

## District of Columbia Education Analysis

This document excerpts the “Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity” section from the District of Columbia Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing as well as an analysis of how the location of proficient schools and school assignment policies serves as a contributing factor to disparities in education. The analysis discusses the demographics of the city and explores how school boundaries, patterns of housing siting, school rating systems, and more affect access to quality schools as well as segregation in schools. It also includes HUD-provided data on demographics and school performance (based on 4<sup>th</sup> grade test scores), demarcated by Census tract.

### Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity

*For the protected class groups HUD has provided data, describe any disparities in access to proficient schools in the jurisdiction and Region.*

**Table 1: Opportunity Indicators by Race/Ethnicity, Washington, D.C. and Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Region**

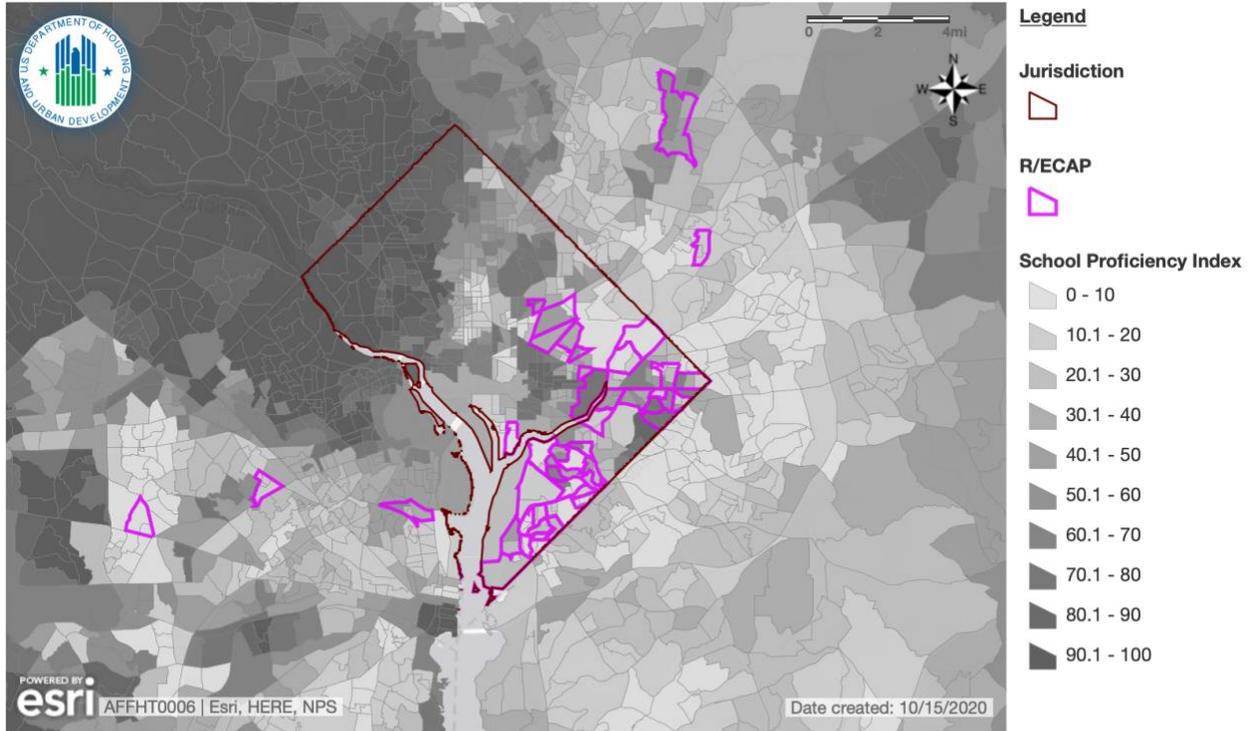
<b>Washington, D.C.</b>	<b>School Proficiency Index</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	68.43
Black, Non-Hispanic	34.41
Hispanic	51.22
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	63.38
Native American, Non-Hispanic	46.48
<b>Population below federal poverty line</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	64.55
Black, Non-Hispanic	30.27
Hispanic	49.41
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	62.73
Native American, Non-Hispanic	52.69
<b>(Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV) Region</b>	
<b>Total Population</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	41.08
Black, Non-Hispanic	39.11
Hispanic	39.67

Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	38.83
Native American, Non-Hispanic	39.58
<b>Population below federal poverty line</b>	
White, Non-Hispanic	42.18
Black, Non-Hispanic	38.25
Hispanic	38.97
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	41.58
Native American, Non-Hispanic	43.65

In D.C., Black and Hispanic residents have lower access to proficient schools than other racial and ethnic groups. D.C. has a large range of School Proficiency Index scores with wide levels of access across racial and ethnic groups. This trend continues for racial and ethnic groups residing immediately outside the city as well, mimicking racial and ethnic residential patterns within D.C. For example, western areas of D.C. have a high population of White residents, and this continues beyond the western border of the District into Bethesda, with consistently high access to proficient schools. On the other hand, the Northeast area of D.C. contains higher populations of Black and Hispanic residents with low access to proficient schools, and this continues along the Northeast border of the District into Maryland. Hispanic residents in the middle of D.C., including a large Salvadoran community, have middling access to proficient schools when compared with the Northwest quadrant of D.C. Black residents in Northeast and Southeast D.C., especially the region south of the Anacostia River, have drastically lower access to proficient schools than the rest of D.C. Meanwhile, Asian residents have consistent access to proficient schools throughout D.C. Differences are negligible for those below the poverty line. On the regional level, school proficiency for every group except White residents rises, while it falls by more than 20 points for White residents. Once again, differences for those below the poverty line are negligible. The increase in scores for Black residents in the Region is likely influenced at least in part by the less severe segregative patterns in the Region than in D.C., and the lessened economic pressures due to more affordable housing markets in some areas outside of the city.

*For the protected class groups HUD has provided data, describe how the disparities in access to proficient schools relate to residential living patterns in the jurisdiction and Region*

### HUD Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool



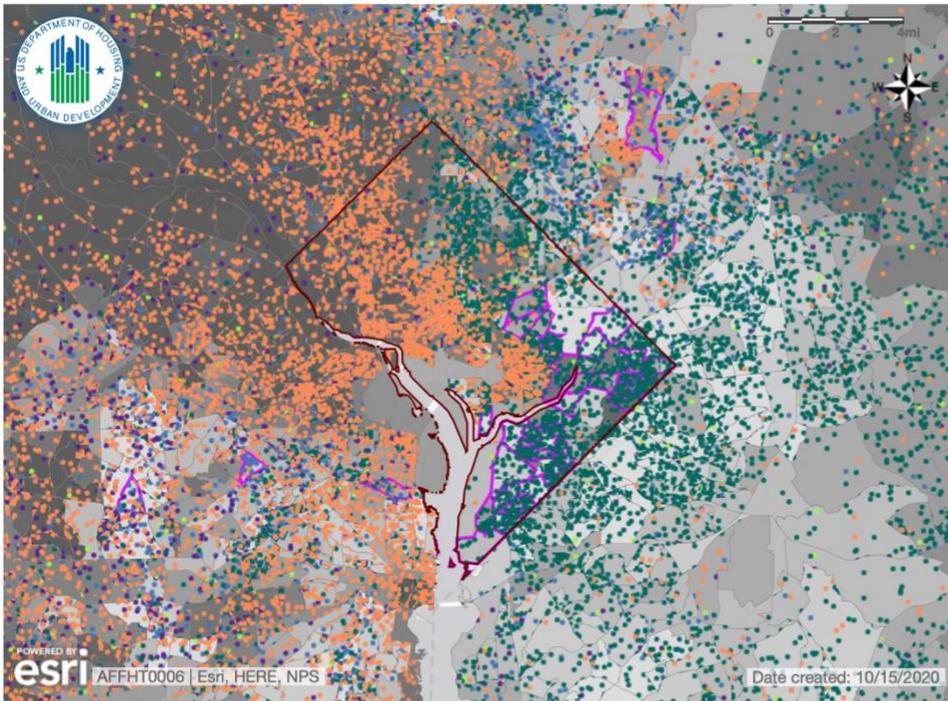
**Name:** Map 7 - Demographics and School Proficiency

**Description:** School Proficiency Index for Jurisdiction and Region with race/ethnicity, national origin, family status, and R/ECAPs

**Jurisdiction:** District Of Columbia (CDBG)

**Region:** Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV

# HUD Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool



## Legend

### Jurisdiction



### Demographics 2010

1 Dot = 75

White, Non-Hispanic

Black, Non-Hispanic

Native American, Non-Hispanic

Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic

Hispanic

Other, Non-Hispanic

Multi-racial, Non-Hispanic

### R/ECAP



### School Proficiency Index

0 - 10

10.1 - 20

20.1 - 30

30.1 - 40

40.1 - 50

50.1 - 60

60.1 - 70

70.1 - 80

80.1 - 90

90.1 - 100

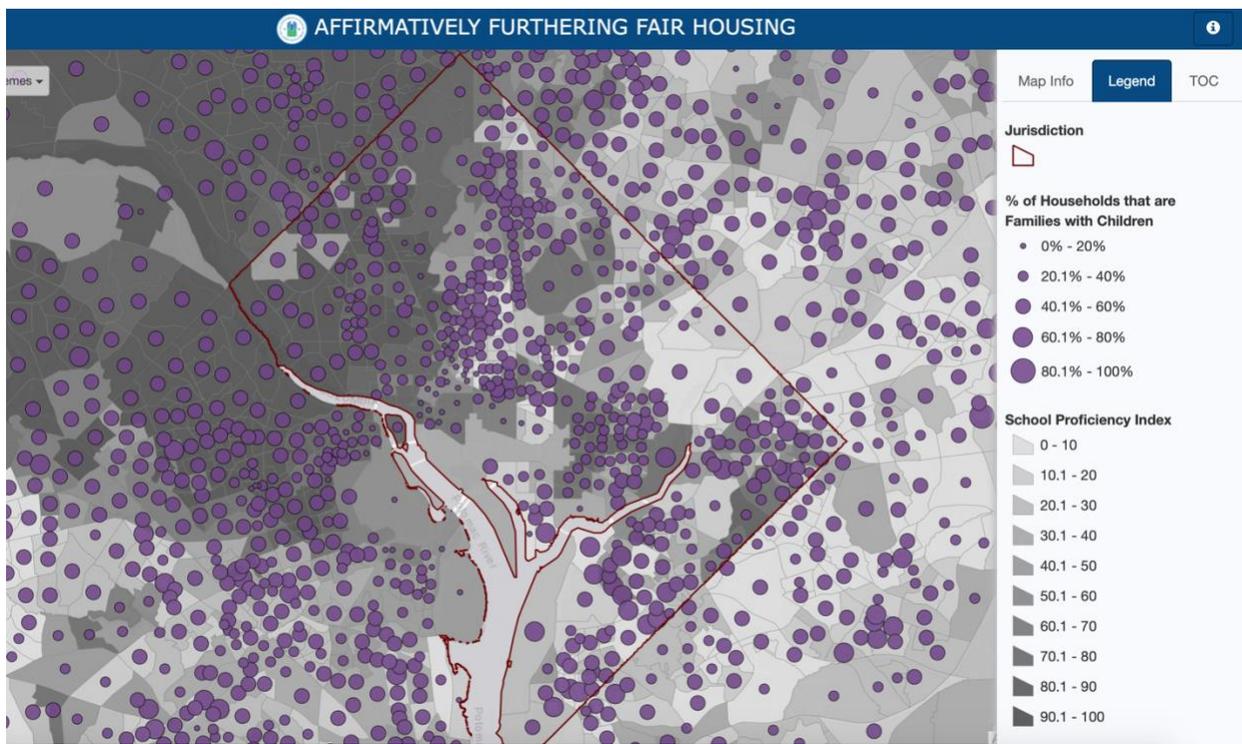
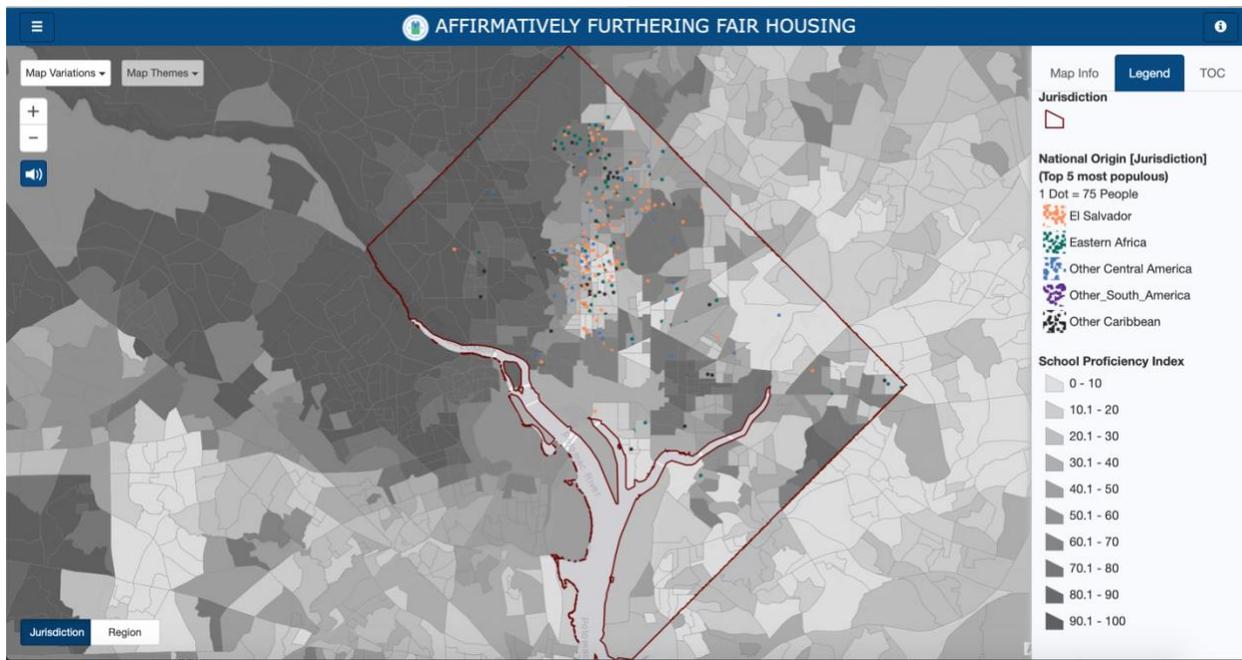
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**HUD-Provided Data Version:** AFFHT0006



In D.C., patterns of access to proficient schools are linked to broader residential patterns. As explored previously, D.C. has distinct patterns of segregation, with White residents having more presence in much of the Northwest section of D.C., and Black residents being more present in

the East of the District, and the section southeast of the Anacostia River. This pattern of segregation is also strongly linked to access to proficient schools within D.C.'s borders.

The western section of D.C. has consistently high levels of access to proficient schools, with ranges of School Proficiency Index scores from 70-100. This region also has higher populations of White and Asian residents, especially in the westernmost corner of D.C., as well as larger numbers of families with children.

The center of D.C., along the Metro's Green Line and including the 16th Street Heights and Brightwood neighborhoods, has lower levels of access to proficient schools, with School Proficiency Index scores ranging from 20-50. This affects the large population of Salvadoran residents in the area.

In downtown, access to proficient schools is generally high, with the exception of the Chinatown area (though this neighborhood does have a larger number of families with children than most of the surrounding neighborhoods). The Capitol Hill neighborhood also has higher levels of access to proficient schools, though this changes to the north of Florida Ave. and south of the Anacostia River. These areas, Northeast and Southeast D.C., have the lowest access to proficient schools in the District, with some exceptions.

The neighborhoods of University Heights, Brentwood and Edgewood in Northeast D.C. have higher levels of access to proficient schools than surrounding areas. This is likely because of the number of universities in the region, including Trinity College and the Catholic University of America.

On the regional level, the map above indicates that there is a clear pattern of high proficiency schools along the Potomac River to the northwest of D.C., as well as in large swaths of Northern Virginia and Maryland. At the very edges of the region on both the Virginia and Maryland sides, school proficiency levels are noticeably lower.

### **Contributing Factor: Location of Proficient Schools and School Assignment Policies**

Segregation and access to high performing schools is strongly affected by racial and economic residential segregation in D.C. D.C.'s system of district-wide choice, the lottery, the expanded charter sector, and the STAR rating system, are all intended, in part, to counteract the educational impacts of segregation. As a result, low income students of color in D.C. have access to a wide range of schools, and many are able to access their first-choice schools. However, the lottery and school choice system are only a partial solution to the problem of unequal access to the higher performing schools in D.C.

#### **Overview:**

Since the passage of the D.C. School Reform Act of 1995, two systems of public schools have served students in the District of Columbia: District of Columbia Public Schools ("DCPS") and District of Columbia Public Charter Schools ("PCS"). As of SY 2018-2019, there are 116

traditional public schools in DCPS, and 123 public charter schools in PCS operated by 66 nonprofits.<sup>1</sup> There are 49,056 students in traditional public schools and 43,960 students in public charter schools;<sup>2</sup> these numbers equate to roughly 53% attending traditional public and 47% attending public charters.<sup>3</sup> Of the total number of students enrolled across both DCPS and PCS, 67.7% are Black, 18.4% are Hispanic, 10.2% are white.<sup>4</sup> 80% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged.<sup>5</sup>

Most students that are low-income in D.C. are also students of color, going to school with other students of color.<sup>6</sup> 71% of Black students in both sectors of public schools attended schools in 2013 that had virtually no white peers.<sup>7</sup> According to D.C. public education scholar Chelsea Coffin, “Black students are by far the most segregated group in the city and the region by race and poverty.”<sup>8</sup> In D.C., charter schools have an even higher level of racial separation than the already historically-segregated traditional public schools. 80% of charter schools were intensely segregated with over 90% students of color in 2012, versus 75% of traditional public schools.<sup>9</sup> Over two-in-three charter schools enrolled over 99% students of color.<sup>10</sup>

As of SY 2017-18, 26% were enrolled in their by-right DCPS school, 27% were enrolled in a DCPS school other than their by-right school, and 47% were enrolled in a public charter school.<sup>11</sup> DCPS schools in Wards 1, 3, and 4 (all of which are among the wealthiest wards in the city) had the highest in-boundary student enrollment growth from 2013 to 2017, while in-boundary enrollment at DCPS schools in Wards 5, 7, and 8 (the three least wealthy wards in the city) decreased.<sup>12</sup> Even within the choice-rich landscape of DC, perceptions of local school quality continue to influence families’ housing decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> DC PCSB. “DC Public Charter Schools.” *District of Columbia Public Charter School Board*, [www.dcpsb.org/](http://www.dcpsb.org/).

<sup>2</sup> <https://osse.dc.gov/page/2018-19-school-year-enrollment-audit-report-and-data>

<sup>3</sup> DCPCSB. “More Students Attend Public Schools: 2019 Audited Enrollment Analysis.” *More Students Attend Public Schools: 2019 Audited Enrollment Analysis* | *District of Columbia Public Charter School Board*, 2019, [www.dcpsb.org/blog/more-students-attend-public-schools-2019-audited-enrollment-analysis](http://www.dcpsb.org/blog/more-students-attend-public-schools-2019-audited-enrollment-analysis).

<sup>4</sup> Asian and Multiracial students constitute the remaining percentage. OSSE, et al. *District of Columbia PK3-12 2016-2017 Equity Report*. [osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2017\\_Equity\\_Report\\_Citywide\\_District%20of%20Columbia%20PK3-12.pdf](http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2017_Equity_Report_Citywide_District%20of%20Columbia%20PK3-12.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> OSSE, et al, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Orfield, Gary, and Jongyeon Ee. “Our Segregated Capital: An Increasingly Diverse City with Racially Polarized Schools.” *The Civil Rights Project*, UCLA, 2017, [www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/our-segregated-capital-an-increasingly-diverse-city-with-racially-polarized-schools/POSTVERSION\\_DC\\_020117.pdf](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/our-segregated-capital-an-increasingly-diverse-city-with-racially-polarized-schools/POSTVERSION_DC_020117.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Orfield & Ee, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Coffin, Chelsea. *Landscape of Diversity in D.C. Public Schools*. DC Policy Center, 2018, [www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/landscape-of-diversity-in-dc-public-schools/](http://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/landscape-of-diversity-in-dc-public-schools/).

<sup>9</sup> Coffin, *ibid*.

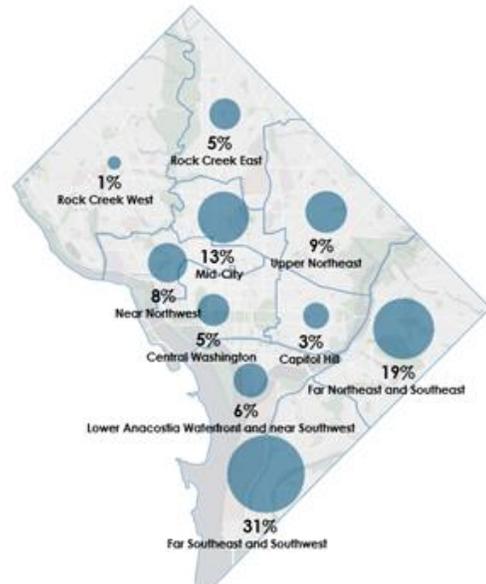
<sup>10</sup> Orfield & Ee, *supra*.

<sup>11</sup> Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME). “DC Public Education Master Facilities Plan (MFP),” 2019, [https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DC\\_MFP\\_2019\\_Feb%202021\\_Final\\_compressed\\_0.pdf](https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DC_MFP_2019_Feb%202021_Final_compressed_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), *ibid*.

## 1. Location of publicly assisted housing limits access to proficient schools

For low-income families, exclusion from high performing schools is most often accomplished through a combination of housing and school policy – and especially in the decisions local governments make about where to locate affordable housing. In D.C., the distribution of both government subsidized and deed restricted housing is inversely proportional to the location of the highest performing and lowest poverty school zones, and the geographic as-of-right preference for in-zone students that dominates school choice in most DCPS elementary schools helps to lock in opportunity for more privileged students.



*Distribution of income-restricted affordable housing by Comprehensive Plan Area, 2018 (DC Office of Planning)*

The Mayor’s May 2019 Housing Initiative order<sup>13</sup> and the city’s plan to adopt a “fair share” housing plan for each ward in the city<sup>14</sup> is a promising step toward improving access to proficient schools for low income D.C. families, but without a focus on deeply income targeted affordable housing with large bedroom sizes in the highest performing elementary school zones, the plan is unlikely to achieve greater equity in school access. Likewise, without a specific targeted preference for families living in Ward 7 and 8, new affordable housing options in the western neighborhoods of the city is unlikely to make a dent in D.C.’s high rates of school segregation.

## 2. Although increasing white middle class enrollment has the potential to increase integration, gentrification is limiting access for low-income Black students

In D.C.’s gentrifying neighborhoods, displacement is rampant. The low-income population living in D.C. neighborhoods that are experiencing economic expansion fell by 28 percent from 2000 to 2016.<sup>15</sup> The Black population in these areas fell by 23 percent, while the white population grew by 202 percent.<sup>16</sup> As the city continues to gentrify, traditional DCPS schools have attracted more white families in recent years.<sup>17</sup> Compared with charters, DCPS has “about three times the share of white students and about twice the share of Asian students.”<sup>18</sup> While white student enrollment is rising in DCPS’s early grades, Black students have been shifting from traditional DCPS schools to charters.<sup>19</sup> The increasing concentration of Black students in charters may be because

<sup>13</sup> United States, Congress, Office of the Mayor, and Muriel Bowser. “Mayor’s Order 2019-036: HOUSING INITIATIVE.” *Mayor’s Order 2019-036: HOUSING INITIATIVE*, 10 May 2019. [ggwash.org/files/2019-036\\_Housing\\_Initiative\\_\(5.10\).pdf](http://ggwash.org/files/2019-036_Housing_Initiative_(5.10).pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Alpert, David. “DC Will Set Targets for Housing, Including Affordable Housing, in All 8 Wards by This Fall.” *Greater Greater Washington*, May 2019, [ggwash.org/view/72070/mayor-bowser-targets-housing-8-wards-fall-affordable](http://ggwash.org/view/72070/mayor-bowser-targets-housing-8-wards-fall-affordable).

<sup>15</sup> Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity. *American Neighborhood Change in the 21st Century*. Apr. 2019, [www.law.umn.edu/sites/law.umn.edu/files/metro-files/american\\_neighborhood\\_change\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_century\\_-\\_executive\\_summary\\_-\\_4-2-2019.pdf](http://www.law.umn.edu/sites/law.umn.edu/files/metro-files/american_neighborhood_change_in_the_21st_century_-_executive_summary_-_4-2-2019.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Lei, Serena. *Our Changing City: Schools*. Urban Institute, 2014, [apps.urban.org/features/OurChangingCity/schools/index.html#index](http://apps.urban.org/features/OurChangingCity/schools/index.html#index).

<sup>18</sup> Lei, Serena, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Lei, Serena, *ibid.*

charter schools are “often located in neighborhoods with a large share of students of color and in neighborhoods where traditional public options may be perceived as less desirable by parents.”<sup>20</sup> When in-zone white families flock to select low-poverty DCPS elementary schools with relatively high concentrations of white students, these schools become more “exclusive.” Schools in affluent and gentrifying neighborhoods that offer by-right admission<sup>21</sup> for local families and extend a proximity preference to fill any remaining open seats perpetuate neighborhood and school segregation by incentivizing parents to base their housing decisions on proximity to the perceived highest-quality schools.

### **3. Current school assignment boundaries and feeder patterns do not advance racial and socio-economic integration**

In D.C, the combination of geographic preferences (by-right admission and proximity preferences) for some elementary schools, and current school assignment boundary lines that track segregated housing patterns, exacerbate residential and school segregation. In areas where school attendance is defined or heavily influenced by neighborhood, “decisions about housing cost and density, the location of multifamily rental housing, and the distribution of government-assisted housing subsidies will impact patterns of school enrollment based on race and income.”<sup>22</sup> Higher-income families with children tend to cluster and bid up the price of housing in the “highest-performing” (and lowest-poverty) districts.<sup>23</sup> Affluent families in such neighborhoods use the geographic preference to enroll their children at the PK/Kindergarten level, thus securing their children’s place into an exclusive feeder pattern that extends through the end of high school. Students in Wards 7 & 8 have lower access to above-average proficiency schools than their west-of-the-river peers, which means families must choose between low-performing neighborhood schools, nearby charter schools, or long travel times (with no elementary school student transportation) to schools in Wards 1-6 (contingent upon winning seats in the lottery).

An impactful, though politically challenging solution would be to de-emphasize by-right neighborhood admission to DCPS elementary schools (and other geographic preferences in the lottery system), including the possibility of a low income set-aside for incoming pre-K students. Another policy solution would be to explore the possibility of creating non-contiguous school zones or pairing of elementary schools.

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<sup>20</sup> Blagg, Kristin, et al. “The Road to School: How Far Students Travel to School in the Choice-Rich Cities of Denver, Detroit, New Orleans, New York City, and Washington, DC.” *Urban Institute*, Mar. 2018, [www.urban.org/research/publication/road-school-how-far-students-travel-school-choice-rich-cities-denver-detroit-new-orleans-new-york-city-and-washington-dc/view/full\\_report](http://www.urban.org/research/publication/road-school-how-far-students-travel-school-choice-rich-cities-denver-detroit-new-orleans-new-york-city-and-washington-dc/view/full_report).

<sup>21</sup> DCPS has in-boundary schools (also called neighborhood schools), which are “a DCPS school that a student has a right to attend in Kindergarten through grade 12 based on where the student lives. The school district has attendance zones (boundary lines), and each student is assigned to an in-boundary school based on those lines.”

My School DC, “Key Terms.” *Key Terms / My School DC*, [www.myschooldc.org/faq/key-terms#faq-In-boundary-school](http://www.myschooldc.org/faq/key-terms#faq-In-boundary-school).

<sup>22</sup> Tegeler, Philip, and Michael Hilton. *Disrupting the Reciprocal Relationship Between Housing and School Segregation*. A Shared Future: Fostering Communities of Inclusion in an Era of Inequality, 2017, [www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/a\\_shared\\_future\\_disrupting\\_reciprocal\\_relationship.pdf](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/a_shared_future_disrupting_reciprocal_relationship.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Tegeler, Philip, and Michael Hilton, *ibid*.

#### 4. The lottery is not providing equal access to the most proficient schools for low-income students

The District’s school choice and lottery system (MySchoolDC) is designed to put all students on a level playing field, with access to schools across the entire city, not only the local schools within their geographic zone. The lottery system is accompanied by a robust system of outreach and parent information, including events, grassroots outreach, community partnerships, advertising and in-person support for families in low-income and language minority areas.<sup>24</sup> The system has been successful in expanding access to a wider range of schools for low income students, and many students are able to attend their first choice school. However, for a variety of reasons (including student transportation – see section 5 below), access to the highest performing (top 50%) of schools remains unequally distributed.

The D.C. School Lottery (“My School DC”) is a single online application that families can use to apply to: (1) Participating public charter schools (PK3–12); (2) DCPS schools outside of their boundary or feeder pattern for any grade, including DCPS citywide schools; (3) All DCPS PK3 and PK4 programs, including programs at in-boundary schools<sup>25</sup>; and (4) DCPS selective high schools or programs. Families rank up to twelve school choices. An algorithm sorts the applicants creating matches and waitlists. When the algorithm “compares two students who have applied to the same school, the decision is based on two criteria: the students’ randomly assigned lottery number, and the students’ preferences at that school”<sup>26</sup> (e.g., geographic preference, sibling preference).<sup>27</sup>

In 2019, 65% of applicants received an initial school match through the lottery,<sup>28</sup> and an additional 19% achieve access to schools of their choice through waitlist admissions or post-lottery applications.<sup>29</sup> Students living in the wealthier wards in the northwest have very high access to above-average proficiency schools in their neighborhood, which may explain their relatively low lottery participation.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, students living across the Anacostia River have fewer proficient school options in their home wards, and are more dependent on the lottery to access a school of their choice.

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<sup>24</sup> FY 18 OSSE Performance Oversight Questions, Q73.

<sup>25</sup> “An in-boundary school (also called a neighborhood school) is a DCPS school that a student has a right to attend in Kindergarten through grade 12 based on where the student lives. The school district has attendance zones (boundary lines), and each student is assigned to an in-boundary school based on those lines.”

My School DC, supra.

<sup>26</sup> Peretti, Catherine, and Aaron Parrott. *Giving At-Risk Students Preference in a Unified Lottery for Public Schools*. Apr. 2018,

[www.myschooldc.org/sites/default/files/dc/sites/myschooldc/page/MSDC%20At-Risk%20Preference%20in%20a%20Unified%20Lottery%204.26.2018\\_Final.pdf](http://www.myschooldc.org/sites/default/files/dc/sites/myschooldc/page/MSDC%20At-Risk%20Preference%20in%20a%20Unified%20Lottery%204.26.2018_Final.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Students and families do NOT need to submit a lottery application if their child will: (1) Attend a right-to-attend\*\* DCPS school for grades K–12; or (2) Remain in his or her current school. \*\*A student’s right-to-attend school is a DCPS school where that student can enroll at any time in Kindergarten through grade 12. Students do not apply to their right-to-attend schools. There are two types of right-to-attend schools for K–12 students: in-boundary schools and feeder-pattern schools.

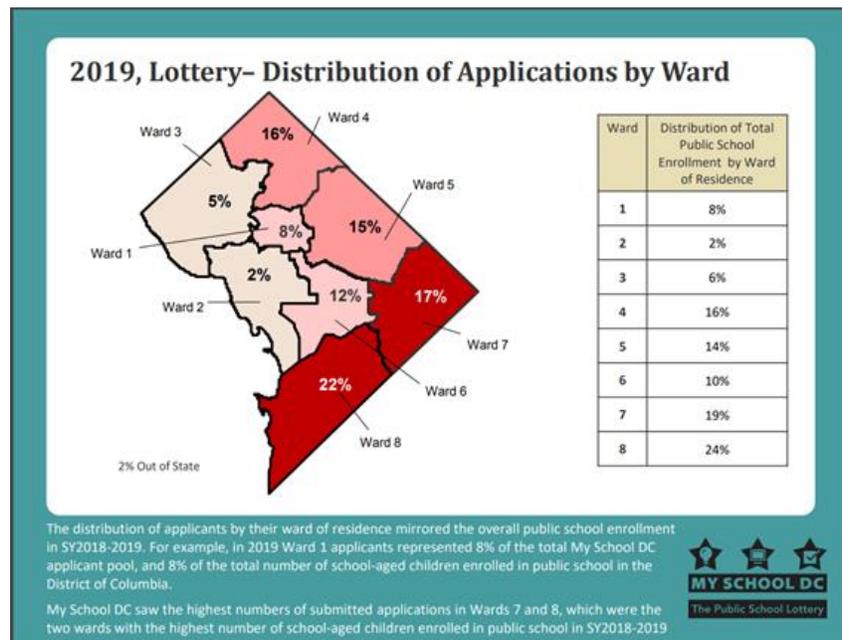
My School DC, supra.

<sup>28</sup> My School DC, supra.

<sup>29</sup> Information supplied by OSSE.

<sup>30</sup> There is also a long-established private school sector in DC that attracts many wealthy families, which may also explain the relatively low lottery participation rates.

The lottery’s potential as a tool to integrate schools and expand options for low-income and students of color is limited by the fact that elementary schools are able to impose by-right



geographic admission for in-zone students, advantaging families who can afford real estate in hot school zones. Take for example the lottery scenario analyzed by Catherine Peretti and Aaron Parrott: “Four of the highest performing DCPS elementary schools that serve the fewest at-risk students offered 258 seats in the unified lottery. Of those, only 28 seats were awarded to out-of-boundary students... 5 of those 28 had a sibling already at the school, so only 23 lottery seats across four schools were truly awarded

on the ‘open market’ to students living outside of the boundary.”<sup>31</sup>

One solution to promote equity would be an at-risk preference in the lottery. According to one analysis, the potential impact of at-risk lottery preferences on at-risk students gaining a match in the lottery would be positive.<sup>32</sup> However, “these matches will have little impact on the socioeconomic diversity of the qualifying schools because the new number of matches is relatively small in comparison to total enrollment.”<sup>33</sup> Using the unified lottery as a tool for redistributing students among schools is limited by the number of seats offered in the lottery relative to total school populations (including students in the as-of-right elementary school attendance zone). An alternative would be to establish a set-aside of at-risk seats for incoming students at the Pre-K/K level.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Lack of student transportation services limit low-income students access to proficient schools

Through the Kids Ride Free program, all D.C. students have free bus and metrorail access, but there is no central school bus system. Lack of student transportation primarily affects children at the elementary school level, who are often considered too young to ride public transportation alone. A safe, consistent, school-organized student transportation system would support low-

<sup>31</sup> Peretti, Catherine, and Aaron Parrott, supra.

<sup>32</sup> That is, more at-risk students gain matches when all varieties of the at-risk preference are applied to the qualifying schools.

<sup>33</sup> Peretti, Catherine, and Aaron Parrott, supra.

<sup>34</sup> Denver Public Schools has successfully implemented a version of this approach by giving a preference in their lottery at 20 low-poverty schools for low-income students while also opening a comprehensive high school that reserves a third of available seats for students residing in high-poverty neighborhoods. Coffin, Chelsea, supra.

income parents to send their kids to schools in high-opportunity neighborhood schools outside of their neighborhoods, if they so choose. The lack of school-supported transportation limits the school choices of Black and low-income elementary school students in neighborhoods with lower access to proficient schools. In D.C., the cumulative effect of this transportation policy enhances the effects of housing segregation, especially for those who are geographically separated in Wards 7 & 8, far from the city's top schools.

## **6. Admissions criteria for selective high schools diminishes access**

Despite the fact that 23% of all public school students live in Ward 8, there is no selective high school there.<sup>35</sup> All eight selective high schools require some form of interview, four of which require the parent or family to be present.<sup>36</sup> Taking time off of work to attend a family interview may be a barrier for low-income wage workers with limited work flexibility, disposable time, and limited transportation options. The changing demographics of some selective schools is also worthy of attention. From SY 2014/2015 - 2016/2017, School Without Walls flipped plurality racial and ethnic group from African American to white; Columbia Heights EC changed plurality from at-risk to not-at-risk.<sup>37</sup> Though the selective high schools meet an important need to provide ambitious curriculum in the DCPS landscape, attention should be paid to the unintentional ways in which the location, admissions process, and changing demographics of these schools may signal unequal access for D.C.'s most vulnerable students.

## **7. Current school rating systems exacerbate segregation and diminish access to proficient schools**

D.C.'s "STAR" system, designed to provide transparency and accountability, may also have the effect of stigmatizing higher poverty schools. Schools with more affluent student bodies tend to produce higher test scores, even in a system like D.C., where year-to-year progress is also incorporated into the school ratings. Professor Jack Schneider (an advocate of holistic school measures) explains the general trend, that "[p]erceived as 'good,' [highly-ranked schools] become the objects of desire for well-resourced and quality-conscious parents," while lower ranked schools are avoided.<sup>38</sup> Thus, parents with the ability to buy into highly rated school zones can choose "good" schools, while parents without that privilege often must make do with the lower-ranked schools. The highest-scoring D.C. school in the STAR system was Benjamin Banneker High in Northwest, which received 99 points; the lowest-scoring school was Anacostia High in Southeast, which received about 3 points.<sup>39</sup> Poor rankings assigned to schools with large numbers of low income children can perpetuate stereotypes of failure that scare away parents and potential teachers with the ability to enrich the institution. School ratings and perceived school

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<sup>35</sup> Although 19% of all public students live in Ward 7, there is only one selective school in the ward.

<sup>36</sup> MySchoolDC.org. *DCPS SELECTIVE HIGH SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS – APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND ADMISSIONS PROCESS SY19-20*. DCPS, [www.myschooldc.org/sites/default/files/dc/sites/myschooldc/page/SY19-20%20Selective%20High%20School%20Requirements%20%28FINAL\\_English%29.pdf](http://www.myschooldc.org/sites/default/files/dc/sites/myschooldc/page/SY19-20%20Selective%20High%20School%20Requirements%20%28FINAL_English%29.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Coffin, Chelsea, *supra*.

<sup>38</sup> Schneider, Jack. "What Makes a Great School?" *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, [www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/10/what-makes-great-school](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/10/what-makes-great-school).

<sup>39</sup> In DC, the majority of schools that received poor rankings in the new system are located in Wards 7 & 8. Truong, Debbie. "Star Ratings Show D.C. Schools That Need the Most Help." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 7 Dec. 2018, [www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/star-ratings-show-dc-schools-that-need-the-most-help/2018/12/07/76f1f6d2-fa43-11e8-863c-9e2f864d47e7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.683c5c81565b](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/star-ratings-show-dc-schools-that-need-the-most-help/2018/12/07/76f1f6d2-fa43-11e8-863c-9e2f864d47e7_story.html?utm_term=.683c5c81565b).

quality are only one factor influencing parents' school choices in D.C. – other factors include distance from home and student diversity.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A 2016 Mathematica study of the DC lottery, funded by the Walton Foundation, provides an in-depth look at the factors influence parent choice in DC schools. <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/market-signals-evidence-on-the-determinants-and-consequences-of-school-choice-from-a-citywide>.