

EXCERPT FROM DRAFT ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING,
WASHINGTON, DC - JUNE 16, 2018 (FROM SECTION ON “CONTRIBUTING FACTORS”)

Location of Proficient Schools and School Assignment Policies

The combined effects of education-related policies in the District, discussed below, are a major contributing factor to segregation and disparities in access to opportunity.

Overview:

Since the passage of the DC 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.¹ There are 48,902 students in traditional public schools and 43,911 students in public charter schools; these numbers equate to roughly 53% attending traditional public and 47% attending public charters.² Of the total number of students enrolled across both DCPS and PCS, 67.7% are Black, 18.4% are Hispanic, 10.2% are white.³ 80% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged.⁴

Most students that are low-income in DC are also students of color, going to school with other students of color.⁵ 71% of Black students in both sectors of public schools attended schools in 2013 that had virtually no white peers.⁶ According to DC public education scholar Chelsea Coffin, “Black students are by far the most segregated group in the city and the region by race and poverty.”⁷ In DC, 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.⁸ Over two-in-three charter schools enrolled over 99% students of color.⁹

DC students have the ability to “choose” where they attend public school — at their DCPS school-of-right, or at a different DCPS or public charter school (pending lottery admission) -- though the ability to fully exercise this choice is largely influenced by socioeconomic factors, which are closely tied to race. 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.¹⁰ 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

¹ DC PCSB. “DC Public Charter Schools.” *District of Columbia Public Charter School Board*, www.dcpsb.org/.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ OSSE, et al, *ibid*.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Orfield & Ee, *ibid*.

⁷ 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/.

⁸ Coffin, *ibid*.

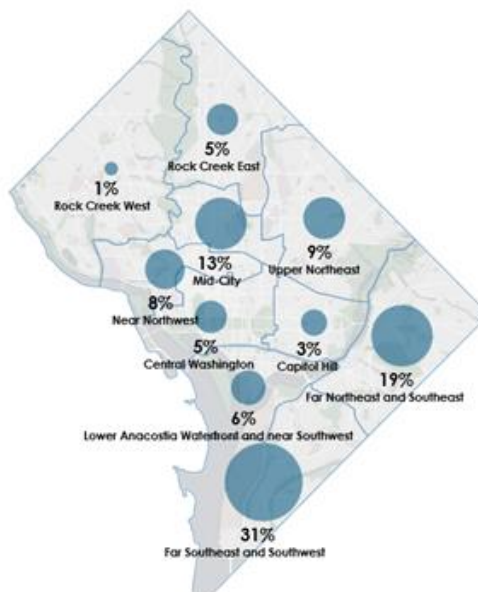
⁹ Orfield & Ee, *supra*.

¹⁰ 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

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.¹¹ Even within the choice-rich landscape of DC, perceptions of local school quality continue to influence families’ housing decisions; thus, housing and education policy remain entwined in the district.

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 DC, 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 preference 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 order¹² and the city’s plan to adopt a “fair share” housing plan for each ward in the city¹³ is a promising step toward improving access to proficient schools for low income DC 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 DC’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 DC’s gentrifying neighborhoods, displacement is rampant. The low-income population living in DC neighborhoods that are experiencing economic expansion fell by 28 percent from 2000 to 2016.¹⁴ The Black population in these areas fell by 23 percent, while the white population grew by 202 percent.¹⁵ As the city continues to gentrify, traditional DCPS schools have attracted more white families in recent years.¹⁶ Compared with charters, DCPS has “about three times the share

¹¹ Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), *ibid*.

¹² 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).

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Lei, Serena. *Our Changing City: Schools*. Urban Institute, 2014, apps.urban.org/features/OurChangingCity/schools/index.html#index.

of white students and about twice the share of Asian students.¹⁷ While white student enrollment is rising in DCPS's early grades, Black students have been shifting from traditional DCPS schools to charters.¹⁸ The increasing concentration of Black students in charters may be because 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.”¹⁹

When white families flock to select low-poverty DCPS elementary schools with relatively high concentrations of white students, these schools become more “exclusive”-- often boasting long waitlists and more than 200 applications per open seat.²⁰ Schools in affluent and gentrifying neighborhoods that offer by-right admission²¹ 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 Washington, DC, the combination of geographic preferences in the lottery 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.”²² Higher-income families with children tend to cluster and bid up the price of housing in the “highest-performing” (and lowest-poverty) districts.²³ Affluent families in such neighborhoods use 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. An impactful, though politically challenging solution would be to de-emphasize geographic preference in the lottery system. Another policy solution would be to explore the possibility of creating non-contiguous school zones or pairing elementary schools.

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

The DC 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

¹⁷ Lei, Serena, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Lei, Serena, *ibid.*

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ The Oyster-Adams Bilingual School (31% white) in Ward 3 received 300 applications per open seat -- the most of any elementary school with open seats in last lottery. Ross Elementary (49% white) in Ward 2 came in second place for the most “sought-after” school, with 200 applications per open seat.

Fischer, Jordan. “300 Applications per Seat? See Which DC Schools Were the Most Sought-after in the 2019-2020 Lottery.” *WUSA*, WUSA, 5 Apr. 2019, www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/300-applications-per-seat-see-which-dc-schools-were-the-most-sought-after-in-the-2019-2020-lottery/65-16583d09-a157-4d35-98e8-bf1a8ee8d7a1.

²¹ 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.

²² 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,

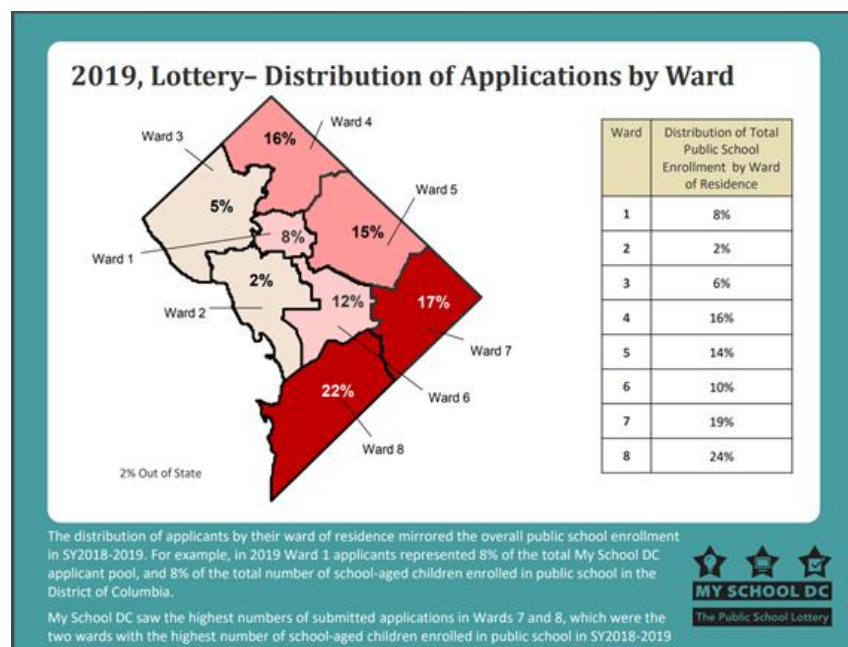
www.ichs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/a_shared_future_disrupting_reciprocal_relationship.pdf.

²³ Tegeler, Philip, and Michael Hilton, *ibid.*

boundary or feeder pattern for any grade, including DCPS citywide schools; (3) All DCPS PK3 and PK4 programs, including programs at in-boundary schools²⁴; 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”²⁵ (e.g., geographic preference, sibling preference).²⁶

In 2019, just 65% of applicants received a school match through the lottery.²⁷ Students living in the wealthier wards in the northwest have very high access to proficient schools in their neighborhood, which may explain their relatively low lottery participation.²⁸ Meanwhile, students living across the Anacostia River have fewer proficient school options in their home wards. Thus, it is the families of DC’s lower-income neighborhoods that are most burdened to navigate and rely on the results of the lottery. The consequences of the low match rate fall disproportionately on students with the low access to proficient schools in their home wards.

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 schools are able to impose geographic preferences during the lottery process.



These preferences advantage 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

²⁴ “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.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ My Schol DC, supra.

²⁸ 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.

schools were truly awarded on the ‘open market’ to students living outside of the boundary.”²⁹

One solution to promote equity would be an at-risk preference. 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.³⁰ 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.”³¹ 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. A workaround would be to establish a set-aside of at-risk seats for new schools or students at the Pre-K/K level.³²

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

Through the Kids Ride Free program, all DC students have free bus and metrorail access, but there is no central school bus system. Lack of student transportation most burdens 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-income parents to send their kids to schools in high-opportunity neighborhoods 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 living outside of the city center in neighborhoods with low-access to proficient schools. In DC, 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.³³ All eight selective high schools require some form of interview, four of which require the parent or family to be present.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 DC’s most vulnerable students.

²⁹ Peretti, Catherine, and Aaron Parrott, *supra*.

³⁰ That is, more at-risk students gain matches when all varieties of the at-risk preference are applied to the qualifying schools.

³¹ Peretti, Catherine, and Aaron Parrott, *supra*.

³² 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*.

³³ Although 19% of all public students live in Ward 7, there is only one selective school in the ward.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Coffin, Chelsea, *supra*.

7. Students in Ward 7 and Ward 8 (19% and 23% of the total public school enrollment respectively) experience disproportionate burdens to access quality schools

Students in Wards 7 & 8 have lower access to proficient schools than their west-of-the-river peers, which means families must choose between low-performing neighborhood schools or long travel times and no student transportation to schools in Wards 1-6 (contingent upon whether they win seats in the lottery for out-of-boundary, which is hard enough). The proliferation of charter schools in DC also disproportionately affects families in Wards 7 & 8, by decreasing enrollment and diminished funding in traditional public schools..³⁶

8. Current school ranking systems exacerbate segregation and diminish access to proficient schools

DC's school rating system negatively impacts under-resourced schools. Schools with more affluent student bodies tend to produce higher test scores. Holistic school measure advocate Jack Schneider explains: "Perceived as 'good,' [highly-ranked schools] become the objects of desire for well-resourced and quality-conscious parents... schools with more diverse student bodies are dismissed as bad."³⁷ Parents with the privilege of choice choose "good" schools, while parents without that privilege often must make do with the lower-ranked schools that suffer from a self-fulfilling lack of investment. The highest-scoring school was Benjamin Banneker High in Northwest, which received 99 points; the lowest-scoring school was Anacostia High in Southeast, which received about 3 points.³⁸ Poor-rankings slapped onto under-resourced schools perpetuate stereotypes of failure that scare away parents and potential teachers with the ability to enrich the institution.

³⁶ Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), *supra*.

³⁷ Schneider, Jack. "What Makes a Great School?" *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/10/what-makes-great-school.

³⁸ 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.

VI. Increase Access to Proficient Schools and Disrupt the Cycle of Residential and School Segregation

- Patterns of housing segregation and housing policies in the District have a significant impact on school segregation and access to proficient schools, and some D.C. education policies reinforce and enhance the effects of housing segregation.
- A. Ensure that families with housing assistance have access to high performing schools.
 - One of the most direct steps that D.C. can take to address disproportionate access to proficient schools is to fully implement the Mayor’s Housing Initiative, with an emphasis on developing a fair share of deeply income targeted apartments with large bedroom sizes in the highest performing D.C. elementary school zones, and giving preference in those units to families with children in neighborhoods with the lowest performing school zones in the District. The D.C. Housing Authority can also play an important role by giving affirmative assistance to families in these low performing school zones who have Housing Choice Vouchers and who wish to move to an apartment in a high performing school zone.
- B. Explore revisions to school assignment boundaries and feeder patterns to avoid reinforcing segregation.
 - When DCPS next revisits its school assignment zones, it should avoid reinforcing housing segregation in its drawing of assignment zones, including possible consideration of non-contiguous assignment zones. Well in advance of the 2023 redrawing of assignment zones, DCPS should embark on a study of its options, including a community engagement process (possibly modeled after the recent community engagement process in NYC District 15).
- C. Explore revisions to the lottery system to avoid reinforcing segregation.
 - Permitting individual schools to prioritize nearby residents accentuates the impacts of housing segregation and limits access of low income children to proficient schools, because families in those attendance zones take up most or all of the available seats, and because of the relative lack of affordable housing in those school zones. This problem can be partially addressed over time by a strong preference for at risk students in all DC elementary schools, or a set-aside of seats for at risk students in the most proficient schools.
- D. Protect students from school displacement.
 - Where low income students are displaced from their neighborhood school by economic pressures, DCPS should consider guaranteeing continued access to the school for the displaced students, in much the same way that homeless students are guaranteed a continued seat in the school.
- E. Address the lack of student transportation services.

- The lack of student transportation enhances the impact of housing segregation and lack of access to proficient schools. It is unclear why D.C. does not offer transportation for elementary school students, as most other school districts do. For many low income families in Wards 7 and 8, the lack of a yellow school bus means that their elementary school children have no realistic choices in other parts of the city. DCPS may want to consider offering student transportation to elementary school students in the lowest performing schools zones in the city.

F. Improve school ranking systems to avoid reinforcing segregation.

- More nuanced school ranking systems, that give more weight to student diversity, school climate, and yearly progress, and better marketing of a diverse range of schools to new residents of the city could help to expand access to highly proficient schools for low income students and students of color.