

October 9, 2020

The Hon. Phil Mendelson  
Chairman  
The Hon. David Grosso, Chair, Committee on Education  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso and Colleagues:

I write to share additional information included in and developed for the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) June 25, 2019 report, [DC Schools Shortchange At-Risk Students](#), for your consideration in oversight of public education in the District. I understand from statements made earlier this week that the Council may schedule one or more additional public hearings on the plans for returning to in-person instruction. Because the current planning places emphasis on serving our most vulnerable students with in-person instruction, the following information may be of interest and/or concern.

The D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) [Term 2 re-opening plan](#) places a priority on in-person, live instruction seat offerings for students who are homeless, who receive special education services or English language services, and students who are considered at-risk. Our work has focused on the equity of opportunity for students considered at-risk, but the same questions apply to students receiving special education services and students who are English language learners. None of these populations of students are equally distributed across DCPS schools. Because the plan does not address the uneven distribution of elementary school students considered at-risk across DCPS schools it is not likely to allocate in-person instruction to all at-risk students equitably.

Looking at elementary schools and not including “education campuses,” using last year’s audited enrollment, and assuming the maximum number of students per classroom (11) as outlined by DCPS, the ODCA analysis found:<sup>1</sup>

- Almost 75% of DCPS elementary schools have more students considered at-risk than they will have in-person, live instruction seat opportunities (48 out of 65 schools).
- For students considered at-risk the likelihood of receiving an in-person, live instruction seat opportunity varies by the concentration of at-risk students in the school. That is, the higher the

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<sup>1</sup> ODCA created an average metric of access to opportunity across schools rather than a per-grade metric. At-risk students, however, may be unequally distributed across grades. For schools with less than ten students considered at-risk in which the exact number was suppressed for privacy; we substituted nine students in these cases, to be conservative. The exact number is likely fewer students considered at risk in these schools.

concentration of at-risk students, the lower the likelihood. Specific likelihoods, on average, range from over 800% likelihood of an in-person, live instruction seat opportunity to a 22% chance of such an opportunity. This is the difference between a likely guaranteed opportunity for at risk students at schools with the fewest at-risk students and a one-in-five chance of receiving an offer for in-person, live instruction for at-risk students in our highest poverty schools.

- For the 12 DCPS elementary schools with over 80% of students considered at-risk, the chances for individual students considered at-risk of receiving an in-person, live instruction seat offer are consistently low, ranging from a high of 38% chance to a low of a 22% chance; i.e., slightly less than a 1/3 chance and a 1/5 chance of receiving an offer.
- These 12 DCPS elementary schools with the lowest likelihood of an in-person, live instruction seat opportunity for students considered at-risk include 10 schools in Ward 8 and 2 in Ward 7.

Questions you may wish to ask based on the ODCA analysis:

- DCPS is offering 7,000 in-person, live instruction seats but enrolls more than 10,000 students considered at-risk in elementary schools. How does DCPS plan to address the highly varying levels of students considered at-risk in the re-opening plan?
- Do you anticipate providing additional resources to schools serving the highest concentrations of need or developing a more equitable allocation of seat offerings?
- As noted, Wards 7 and 8 have the greatest shortage in anticipated number of seat offerings for students considered at-risk. How do you plan to address this shortcoming?
- Do you have information available that indicates what the demand is in individual schools for these seats?

I hope this information is useful to the Council as you consider oversight of the re-opening of our public schools. Please let [me](#) or [Education Research Director Erin Roth](#) know if you have any questions on these findings.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen Patterson  
Auditor of the District of Columbia

cc: D.C. Councilmembers  
Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education  
Lewis Ferebee, DCPS Chancellor