



MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR

May 19, 2023

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

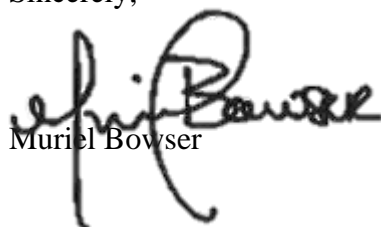
I am pleased to submit to the Council of the District of Columbia the enclosed Fiscal Year 2021 Pre-K Report, prepared by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) pursuant to section 105 of the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008, effective July 18, 2008 (D.C. Law 17-202; D.C. Official Code § 38-271.05).

This report provides an annual update on the quality and capacity of pre-kindergarten (pre-K) education in the District of Columbia. It includes an overview of the District's mixed delivery system of pre-K education, describes the challenge COVID-19 presented for measuring the quality of pre-K delivery in fiscal year 2021 (school year 2020-21), and lists the steps taken to surmount this challenge. This report also provides a detailed breakdown of pre-K enrollment and capacity by sector and demographic background.

In addition, this report describes the steps OSSE took to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain the District's status as the preeminent jurisdiction in the country for access to high-quality public pre-K education, including investing federal recovery funds to stabilize and strengthen the sector. These measures resulted in the District expanding the number of licensed pre-K seats in fiscal year 2021 despite the enormous financial pressure the pandemic inflicted on the industry.

I am available to answer any questions you may have regarding this report. In order to facilitate a response to any questions you may have, please have your staff contact Andrew Gall, Deputy Chief of Staff, OSSE, at (202) 478-9202.

Sincerely,


Muriel Bowser



District of Columbia
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

FISCAL YEAR 2021 PRE-K REPORT

April 2022

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Executive Summary

Overseen by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the District of Columbia's universal pre-K program continues to lead the nation in access and per-pupil funding for pre-K. The District has a mixed delivery universal pre-K system comprised of three sectors: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), public charter schools, and community-based organizations (CBOs) through the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP). Of the District's estimated 17,386 3- and 4-year-olds in school year (SY) 2020-21, 12,923 students (74 percent) were enrolled in the District's universal pre-K system.

The District of Columbia recognizes the importance and impact of pre-K as a catalyst for promoting positive and equitable outcomes for young learners. Research indicates that high-quality early care and educational experiences for young children can improve the odds of success in nearly every aspect of life, from better social and working relationships, to higher earnings, and better health outcomes.

The District continues to increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities that young children need to succeed in school and beyond. While access to pre-K is important, realizing the full benefits of the District's investment in universal pre-K requires an ongoing focus on the quality of pre-K education. The District has invested in several continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts to enhance pre-K quality, including offering professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and leaders across the mixed delivery system, redesigning the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to focus on outcomes, and increasing funding to improve access to, and support for, quality programming.

To measure pre-K classroom quality across the mixed delivery system, OSSE oversees the collection of data using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS[®]), a research-based observational measure. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, OSSE did not require observations of pre-K classrooms for the 2020-21 school year. Instead, the District cancelled in-person observations in accordance with public health guidance and provided an opportunity for voluntary virtual observations through a video streaming platform in early 2021.

As a result, this year's pre-K report is not able to provide data on pre-K classroom quality in the 2020-21 school year. It does, however, present data on pre-k student demographics and enrollment in 2020-21, as well as information on the District's efforts to support local education agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in continuing to deliver early learning opportunities to pre-K children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings include:

- 12,923 children were enrolled in publicly funded pre-k programs in the District in the 2020-21 school year, including 5,604 3-year-olds and 7,319 4-year-olds.
- After increasing rapidly over the past eight years, pre-k enrollment in the District decreased by six percent in the 2020-21 school year; while decreased enrollment occurred across all ages and sectors, enrollment decreases were larger for 3-year-olds (13%) than 4-year-olds (5%) and for DCPS (9.5%) and CBOs (5.2%) than public charter schools (3.2%).
- Black/African American children account for 61% of children enrolled in pre-K in 2020-21, followed by children whose parents identify them as White (21%), Hispanic/Latino (13%), Two or More Races (3%), and Asian (2%).

- Nine percent of children enrolled in pre-K were identified as eligible for special education.
- OSSE implemented a number of policies and strategies to stabilize the early childhood sector and ensure continuous delivery of learning services to pre-K students during the 2020-21 school year, including:
 - Providing waivers and other flexibilities to PKEEP CBOs to operate virtual or hybrid programs and offer smaller class sizes in order to comply with COVID-related health and safety guidance during the 2020-21 school year.
 - Creating guiding principles for continuous education to provide families and LEAs with clear and consistent expectations for the 2020-21 school year. OSSE also required LEAs serving students in Grades PK-12 to develop Continuous Education and School Recovery Plans for the 2020-21 school year to address how LEAs would provide continuous education across their respective systems, including for pre-K students where applicable.

Through these and other initiatives, the District supported CBOs and LEAs to continue to serve pre-K students during this unprecedented school year.

Overview of Pre-K in the District of Columbia

It has been nearly 15 years since the District of Columbia made free, universal pre-K available to all three- and four-year-olds residing within the District with the passage of the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008 (D.C. Official Code § 38-271.01 *et seq.*). Since then, the District has positioned itself as a national leader in the provision of pre-K education and early learning opportunities for young children, prioritized early childhood education as a key element in its larger education reform efforts, and continued to outrank other states in access to high-quality public pre-K.¹

The District utilizes a mixed-delivery system for publicly funded pre-K, in which age-eligible District children may receive publicly funded pre-K from DCPS elementary schools,² approved public charter school sites,³ and CBOs participating in the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP).⁴

In the 2020-21 school year, pre-K was offered in 39 local education agencies (LEAs) and in 29 CBOs.⁵

Some CBOs also provide free and/or subsidized early child care and education services to 3- and 4-year-olds who are not a part of the District's universal pre-K program through Head Start and the District's Subsidized Child Care Program.⁶

District of Columbia's Universal Pre-K: A Mixed Delivery System

As previously mentioned, the District provides universal pre-K through a mixed delivery system, as illustrated in Table 1. The following compose the District's mixed delivery system:

Traditional Public Schools: DCPS offers pre-K for 4-year-olds in all of its 79 elementary schools, 69 of which (87 percent) also offer pre-K for 3-year-olds. Participating LEAs, which include both DCPS and charter LEAs,

¹ See e.g., Adam McCann, *2022's States with the Best & Worst Early Education Systems*, WALLETHUB (Aug. 2, 2022), <https://wallethub.com/edu/e/states-with-the-best-and-worst-early-education-systems/62668> (ranking DC as the number one state in the nation for early education access).

² While some DCPS pre-K programs guarantee in boundary students a seat through the "Early Action PK Program," most DCPS seats, like other District pre-K programs, are filled through OSSE's lottery process, the My School DC application.

³ The D.C. Public Charter School Board authorizes (or denies) charters, including for the provision pre-K education.

⁴ See MyChildCareDC, <https://mychildcare.dc.gov/Home/SearchFacilities?glance=7> (lists CBOs with an OSSE approved high-quality pre-K designation).

⁵ At the start of the 2020-21 school year, 29 CBOs participated in the PKEEP program, but one participating CBO, National Capital Child & Family Development, closed in December 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶ See *Child Care Subsidy/Voucher Program*, OFF. OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUC., <https://osse.dc.gov/service/child-care-subsidyvoucher-program> (last visited Aug. 3, 2022) (for more information on the District's Subsidized Child Care Program).

receive funding at the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) rate for children enrolled in pre-K programs.

Public Charter Schools: Sixty-three of seventy-seven public charter elementary schools (82 percent) offer pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds. Public charter schools are public, taxpayer-funded schools that are authorized by the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) and open to all age-eligible District of Columbia residents regardless of neighborhood of residence.

Community-Based Organizations with one or more Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Classrooms: Participating CBOs are private non-profit and for-profit businesses that provide full-day early care and education and/or before- and after-school services. Pursuant to the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008 (D.C. Official Code § 38-272.01, *et seq.*), OSSE established the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP), which allocates funding equivalent to the UPSFF levels to CBOs to enhance high-quality pre-K education services in their existing pre-K programs. These CBOs also receive funding through the District's child care subsidy program to provide year-round, extended-day services for eligible children. CBOs must meet several requirements to participate in the PKEEP, including: meeting teacher qualification requirements; paying teachers and assistant teachers in PKEEP classrooms wages comparable to DCPS pre-K teachers; providing teacher training opportunities; achieving national accreditation; maintaining a low adult-to-child ratio; implementing a comprehensive curriculum that is approved by OSSE;⁷ implementing valid and reliable assessments; supporting parent involvement; and providing coordinated services to families.

Other Public Funding for Preschool Programs in the District

Subsidized Child Care Program: In addition to tuition paid by families, some CBOs receive child care subsidy funds to provide early care and education services to children ages birth through 12 (or 19 if the child has a disability) from income-eligible families that are working or enrolled in school or training. CBOs that enter into a subsidy agreement with OSSE may receive child care subsidies for eligible children whether or not they participate in the PKEEP program. Child care subsidies are funded through a combination of local funds and federal funds provided through the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). CCDBG funds are allocated to every state and the District of Columbia.

Head Start: The Head Start program provides a federal-to-local early childhood funding stream. Head Start programs support children and families by providing comprehensive services focused on early learning and development, health, and family well-being, in accordance with the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards.⁸ In school year 2020-21 six CBOs in the District of Columbia provided Head Start services to eligible children (children living below the federal poverty level, enrolled in foster care, experiencing homelessness,

⁷ Through inclusion in the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008 or through alignment with the DC Early Learning Standards.

⁸ See, 45 CFR §§ 1302.50—53.

or from families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are eligible to receive Head Start services).⁹

⁹ In April 2022, the federal Administration for Children and Families updated Head Start eligibility policies to expand eligibility to children participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This expanded eligibility policy was not yet in place during the 2020-21 time period covered by this report.

Table 1: Pre-K Programs in the District of Columbia at-a-glance

Setting	Universal Pre-K Program	Delivery System Overview	Funding Source
D.C. Public Schools (DCPS)	Yes	DCPS provide publicly funded pre-K open to all age-eligible District residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● UPSFF for enrolled students.
Public Charter Schools	Yes	Public charter schools provide publicly funded pre-K open to all age-eligible District residents. Public charter schools operate independently of the traditional public school system. Public charter schools are authorized and monitored by the DC PCSB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● UPSFF for enrolled students.
CBOs with PKEEP Classroom(s)	Yes	CBOs that achieve and maintain a high-quality designation under the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act provide publicly funded pre-K open to all age-eligible District residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding equivalent to UPSFF for students enrolled in PKEEP classrooms, provided through the child care subsidy program and grants administered by OSSE. ● Programs may receive direct or indirect federal and local funds.
Non-PKEEP CBO Classrooms	No	CBOs that offer full-day, year-round early care and education services that include pre-K-aged children, including before- and after-school but have not earned OSSE’s high-quality designation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parent tuition payments. ● Public funding for eligible children through the District’s subsidized child care program. ● Some programs may also receive funding through the federal Head Start program.

Implications of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the early care and education sectors. While the exact nature of these challenges varied across sectors and ages of children served, all LEAs and CBOs serving young children in the District were forced to adjust their operations to support children’s learning during the pandemic and comply with health and safety guidance. District government agencies including OSSE, DC Department of Health (DC Health), DCPS, and PCSB worked together to support LEAs and CBOs to continue serving families in need of early care and education, reopen safely, and remain solvent through the pandemic. The following section discusses some of the adjustments made to the District’s universal pre-K program during fiscal year 2021 due to COVID-19.

Adjustments to Pre-K in the 2020-21 School Year

Pre-K in Community-Based Organizations

In August 2020, OSSE issued COVID-19 guidance for CBOs participating in the PKEEP program for the 2020-21 school year. The guidance was intended to enable CBOs to adapt their PKEEP programs to continue to provide high-quality pre-K learning experiences during the 2020-21 school year while complying with COVID-19 health and safety guidance issued by DC Health and OSSE for child development facilities, including by offering virtual or hybrid program models.

The guidance notified CBOs that:

1. OSSE would not enforce the below eligibility criteria for the 2020-21 school year –
 - a. 5A DCMR § 3500.3(e) – Enroll and maintain a class size of no fewer than 15 and no more than 16 children in classrooms where the youngest child is 3 years old or a class size of no fewer than 16 and no more than 20 in classrooms where the youngest child is 4 years old; and
 - b. 5A DCMR § 3500.3(g) – Operate Monday through Friday beginning no earlier than 7 a.m.; provide at least six-and-a-half hours of pre-K education services, at least 39 weeks a year, for a total of at least 180 days; and follow the holiday and closing calendar schedule of DCPS; and
2. OSSE would initiate a high-quality standards waiver process to ensure CBOs could comply with the COVID-19 health and safety guidance. The guidance included a PKEEP COVID-19 Waiver Request Form, a standardized template used to expedite review and approval of the waiver requests.

All PKEEP programs providing in-person services were still required to comply with all applicable OSSE licensing requirements, including those related to staff qualifications, group sizes, adult-to-child ratios, and health and safety protocols.

During the 2020-21 school year, OSSE surveyed PKEEP-participating CBOs on their instructional delivery models, and 24 out of 29 responded to the survey. Results showed that:

- Six programs (25 percent) planned to implement in-person only instruction;

- Six programs (25 percent) planned to implement a hybrid model (a combination of in-person and at-home learning, including models where children would be in person on specific days each week);
- Four programs (17 percent) planned to implement virtual, at-home learning only; and
- Eight programs (33 percent) planned to implement multiple modes of instruction (e.g., some students attend an all-virtual program and others attend only in-person).

OSSE authorized various changes to the District’s school enrollment policies and practices for LEAs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including: 1) providing flexibility for schools to change their internal enrollment processes; 2) authorizing schools to submit enrollment documents electronically; and 3) extending the deadline for families to complete initial enrollment for the 2020-21 school year. These changes affected both LEAs and CBOs participating in the PKEEP program. Pre-K providers were expected to abide by guidance and policies related to COVID-19 in preparation for and during the 2020-21 school year.

Pre-K in Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

OSSE required LEAs that serve students in Grades PK-12 to develop [Continuous Education and School Recovery Plans for the 2020-21 School Year](#) by July 31, 2020. OSSE also developed [Guiding Principles for Continuous Education](#) to provide LEAs and families with clear and consistent expectations for the 2020-21 school year. The Continuous Education Plan process required LEAs to think about how they would provide continuous education across their respective systems, including pre-K where applicable.

To provide LEAs the flexibility to design continuous education and school recovery plans to best fit the school’s individualized needs, OSSE also issued guidance on defining attendance and collecting attendance data for the 2020-21 school year. The guidance was issued to recognize that pre-K education services would be offered in both virtual and in-person formats in the 2020-21 school year.

Federal COVID-Relief Funds and Pre-K

The District of Columbia received federal COVID relief funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Pub. Law 116-136), the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Consolidated Appropriations Act (CRRSA) (Pub. Law 116-260), and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act (Pub. Law 117-2), each of which included dedicated funds for COVID prevention, relief, and recovery activities in public schools (through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER program) and child development facilities (through the Child Care Development Fund, or CCDF, and supplemental appropriations).¹⁰ ESSER funds have been used to support LEAs with pre-K programs in response to the public health emergency and its consequences, and CCDF funds have been used to support children and staff in child development facilities. Both ESSER and CCDF COVID discretionary funds have been used to support state-wide recovery strategies for early childhood education.

¹⁰ Child development facilities may serve infants, toddlers, pre-K students, and school-aged children in before- and/or after- care.

OSSE is using ESSER Recovery Funds to safely reopen schools, address learning loss, provide technology and connectivity, and address additional needs identified by the community, including mental health services and supports in DCPS and public charter school pre-K classrooms. OSSE received a \$42 million CARES-Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER I) award, a \$172 million CRRSA Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief II (ESSER II) award, and a \$386 million ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief III (ESSER III) award.

Through [ESSER I](#), OSSE provided emergency relief funds directly to LEAs to address the impact of COVID-19 on elementary and secondary schools, including providing distance learning for pre-K classrooms and developing return and recovery plans.

The [ESSER II](#) award allowed for broader purposes, but OSSE encouraged LEAs to leverage funding to:

- *Safely reopen schools* – Cover costs of staffing, supplies, equipment, and other expenses necessary to operate during the public health emergency
- *Measure and address learning loss* – Measure and address learning loss for students disproportionately affected by the public health crisis and school closures, including low-income students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care; and
- *Maintain quality school environments, including air quality* – Ensure school facilities are upgraded and maintained to function as safe and high-quality school environments.

For ESSER III, OSSE issued a [Funding Strategy Guide](#) that outlined strategies for LEAs to update their Continuous Education Plans. The Guide provided LEAs with examples of allowable uses for the funds that would align with District priorities to safely reopen schools (e.g., air quality facility upgrades and coronavirus testing measures), address learning loss (e.g., supplemental instructional staff), and address other specific needs (e.g., technology and health resources).

OSSE received CCDF COVID-relief funds through CARES (\$6 million), CRRSA (\$16.6 million), and ARP (\$24.8 million). CARES funds were used to support emergency child care for essential workers and continue subsidy payments to child care providers when most child development facilities were closed in spring, summer, and early fall 2020, as well as to provide emergency relief grants to child development facilities in winter 2021. CRRSA funds were used to provide emergency relief grants in summer and fall 2021 to help child development facilities cover COVID-related operating costs to remain in operation during the pandemic and recovery. Funds were also used to expand access to business and health and safety supports for child development facilities during the 2020-21 school year. Over 90 percent of child development facilities benefitted from these programs in fiscal year 2021, including CBOs participating in the PKEEP program. As a result of these funds and other COVID-related policies implemented by OSSE, the District did not experience the large decrease in child care capacity that some other states experienced in 2020-21.¹¹ In fact the number of

¹¹ See, e.g., Rasheed Malik, et al., *The Coronavirus Will Make Child Care Deserts Worse and Exacerbate Inequality*, CTR. FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (JUNE 22, 2020), [HTTPS://WWW.AMERICANPROGRESS.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2020/06/CORONAVIRUS-WORSENS-CHILD-CARE-DESERTS.PDF](https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/coronavirus-worsens-child-care-deserts.pdf); *Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19*, CHILD CARE AWARE OF AMERICA (Fall 2020), <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Picking%20Up%20The%20Pieces%20%E2%80%94%20Building%20A%20Better>

licensed child care seats in the District grew from 26,900 in September 2020 to 27,175 in June 2021. Starting in Fall 2022, ARP-CCDF funds will be used to increase child care subsidy rates and expand access to scholarships and retention incentives for the child care workforce in 2022 through 2024.

The District also received \$39.8 million in Child Care Stabilization Grant funds through ARP, which is being distributed to child development facilities in 2022 and early 2023. In addition, Mayor Bowser allocated \$2.4 million in Governor's Education Emergency Relief funds received by the District through CRRSA to fund additional relief grants for child development facilities that participate in the District's child care subsidy program and experienced significant declines in subsidy revenues as a result of the pandemic, including eligible CBOs participating in the PKEEP program.

OSSE's Guidance and Technical Assistance

The OSSE Division of Early Learning (DEL) developed targeted training and professional development through the online [Professional Development Information System \(PDIS\)](#) for all LEA and CBO staff serving children from birth through 3rd grade students. Through PDIS and OSSE-certified trainers, OSSE provided 847 face-to-face and synchronous online professional learning opportunities for approximately 22,048 participants in FY2021.¹² DEL also produced the following resources to support LEAs and CBOs transitioning to virtual/distance learning:

- OSSE's [Distance Learning for Early Childhood Education](#) guide, outlining ways that early care and education providers can engage with children and families in a virtual setting; and
- OSSE's [Social Emotional, Trauma-Informed Practices and COVID-19](#) document, providing resources and learning opportunities on social emotional and trauma-informed practices and COVID-19-related supports for early childhood providers.

DCPS supported its pre-K teachers' transition to remote learning through the following trainings offered in spring 2020:

1. Engaging families remotely;
2. Designing and implementing lesson plans using Canvas (an online learning management platform); and
3. Utilizing Microsoft Teams for virtual instruction.

DCPS also provided ongoing trainings during the 2020-21 school year to increase teachers' proficiency with online learning platforms and to effectively engage and instruct students virtually. In addition, DCPS developed a variety of virtual learning resources and materials and distributed them to DCPS teachers and families to support virtual learning.

[%20Child%20Care%20System%20Post%20COVID%2019.pdf?utm_campaign=Picking%20Up%20The%20Pieces&utm_source=Full%20Report%20PDF.](#)

¹² Note: Individuals who participated in multiple trainings are counted for each training in which they participated.

Capacity of Universal Pre-K Programs in the District

Enrollment

The District of Columbia continues to be a national leader in access to, and participation in, public pre-K. According to the 2020 census population estimates, approximately 17,386 3- and 4-year-old children resided in the District. In fiscal year 2021 (FY21), public pre-K programs served 12,923 children. Although this represents a decrease in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-old children served in the District from FY20, overall uptake of universal pre-K remains high. An additional 648 children who were not enrolled in public pre-K received full-day subsidized care in FY21.

Table 2. Three-year-olds and four-year-olds served by public pre-K in DC in FY21

Age	Census Data	Number of Children Served in FY21	Number of Children Served in FY20	Percent of Children Served in FY21	Percent Change in Number of Children Served from Prior Year
3-Year-Olds	8,744	5,604	6,435	64%	-12.9%
4-Year-Olds	8,642	7,319	7,356	85%	-0.5%
Total	17,386	12,923	13,791	74%	-6.3%

Note: In Table 2, Census Data population estimates use data from FY2020 since FY2021 census data have not been published due to the impacts of COVID-19 on census data collection. Age eligibility for enrollment is based upon September 30 birthdate cutoff.¹³ Enrollment data is sourced from OSSE’s annual enrollment audit and is the enrollment count as of October 5, 2021 (for FY21) and October 5, 2020 (for FY20). Please note that the FY20 count includes 161 children who were not a part of the District’s universal pre-K program and excludes 102 children under 3 and over age 5 who were enrolled in universal pre-K.

Overall public pre-K enrollment in the District decreased 5.9 percent from FY20 to FY21.¹⁴ Enrollment in public pre-K in the District has decreased across all sectors. DCPS enrollment experienced a 9.6 percent decline, compared to a 3.2 percent drop in PKEEP CBOs, and a 5.2 percent decline in PCS between FY20 and FY21.

¹³ See DC Code § 38-273.02(a).

¹⁴ This percentage decrease is slightly different from the percentage decrease for 3- and 4-year-olds reported in Table 2 because it includes a small number of children under age 3 and over age 5 who were included in pre-K enrollment in FY20.

Table 3. Universal pre-K program enrollment by sector in FY21

Sector	Sites	Enrollment in FY21	Enrollment in FY20	Percent Change in Enrollment from Prior Year
DCPS	79	5,502	6,086	-9.6%
CBO (PKEEP)	28	979	1,011	-3.2%
PCS	63	6,442	6,796	-5.2%

Note: In Table 3, the enrollment number totals for FY20 include 161 children who were enrolled in these programs but who were not a part of the District’s universal pre-K program.

Universal Pre-K Capacity in the District

The District continues to support the use of a mixed delivery system for its public pre-K program to provide families with options to participate in pre-k across all sectors. Data on PCS capacity and utilization is not available in FY21 because this information is typically collected from PCS through CLASS observations, which were cancelled in 2020-21 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, OSSE collects capacity and utilization data from DCPS and CBO pre-k classrooms through other reporting that was continued. Therefore, capacity and utilization calculations for FY21 are based on data from DCPS and CBOs only, resulting in smaller enrollment figures for this section than District-wide enrollment.

Utilization in DCPS and PKEEP CBOs remained strong in FY21, at nearly 90 percent in DCPS and over 95 percent for PKEEP CBOs. Comparisons of enrollment in DCPS and CBO PKEEP classrooms suggests that the District has capacity to serve additional children in publicly funded pre-K programs.

Table 4. Universal pre-K program access by sector in FY21

Sector	Sites	Enrollment	Number of Classrooms	Estimated Capacity ¹⁵	Utilization ¹⁶	Available Slots
DCPS	79	5,502	375	6,149	89.5%	647
CBO (PKEEP)	28	979	64	1,024	95.6%	45

¹⁵ For PKEEP CBOs, capacity is estimated using classroom configuration data to determine an appropriate weight to calculate capacity. PKEEP classrooms were weighted at 16 children per classroom. For DCPS, capacity was calculated using the number of general education seats in both general and inclusion classrooms.

¹⁶ Estimated utilization is calculated as the number of enrolled children divided by the estimated capacity. Information on capacity on a per-classroom basis is available only for DCPS and therefore utilization may exceed 100% where actual capacity differs from OSSE’s estimated capacity formula.

PCS	63	6,442	-	-	-	-
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Note: In Table 4, only DCPS and CBOs have calculated capacity and utilization as public charter school capacity was not available for FY21 due to interruption of CLASS observations by COVID-19.

Utilization is high across all eight wards, ranging from 75 percent in facilities located in Ward 8 to over 100 percent in facilities located in Ward 1 and Ward 5 (see Table 5).

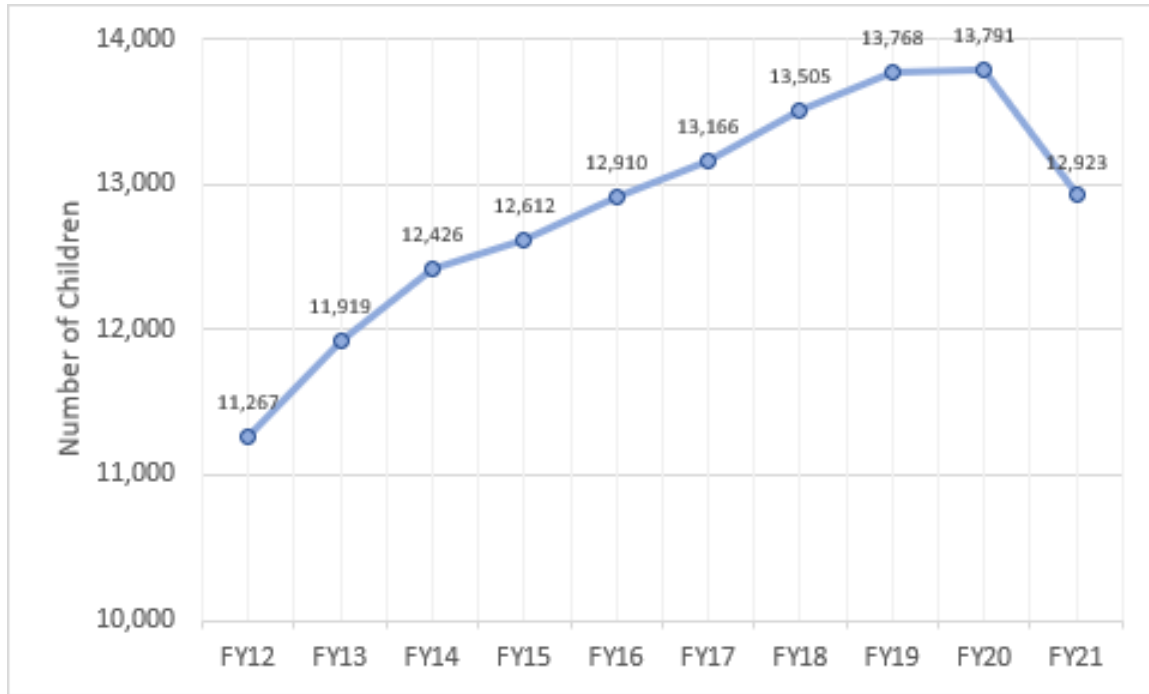
Table 5. Universal pre-K program access by ward in FY21

	Total Sites	Enrollment	Number of DCPS Classrooms	Number of CBO PKEEP Classrooms	Number of PCS Classrooms	Estimated Capacity	Estimated Utilization
Ward 1	15	881	40	17	-	796	110.7%
Ward 2	8	419	25	2	-	429	97.7%
Ward 3	9	461	15	10	-	487	94.7%
Ward 4	28	1,182	71	10	-	1,303	90.7%
Ward 5	30	597	37	4	-	564	105.9%
Ward 6	22	1,092	68	0	-	1,291	84.6%
Ward 7	23	792	52	6	-	963	82.2%
Ward 8	35	1,004	65	15	-	1,340	74.9%
Total	170	6,428	373	64	-	7,173	89.6%

Enrollment in Universal Pre-K Over Time

From FY12 through FY22, enrollment in public pre-K programs in the District of Columbia steadily increased, before declining sharply in FY21, likely due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over recent years, enrollment in public pre-K has increased at an annual growth rate of 2.6 percent before decreasing seven percent in FY21.

Figure 1. Universal pre-K enrollment from FY12 to FY21



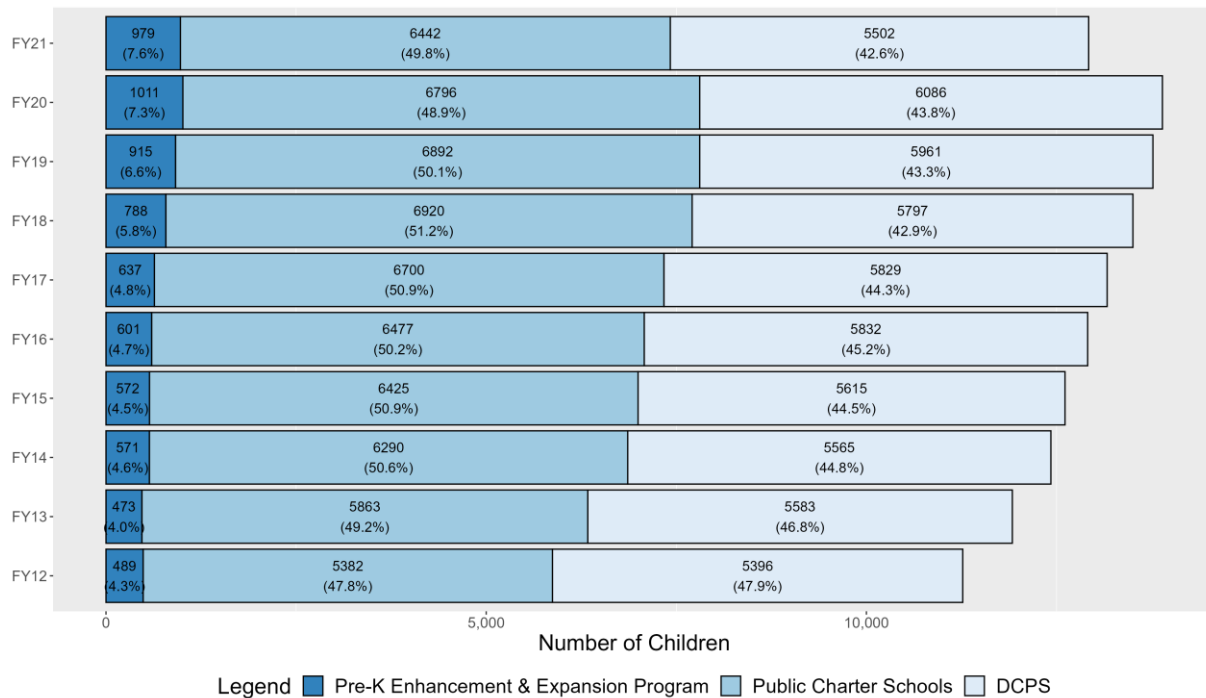
Over time, growth in public pre-K enrollment has been shared across all three sectors (see Figure 2). From FY12 to FY20, enrollment in DCPS pre-K programs increased by 607 children (an 11 percent increase). During the same time period, pre-K enrollment increased by 1,414 children (a 26 percent increase) in public charter schools and by 522 children (a 107 percent increase) in PKEEP CBO programs. As noted above, enrollment decreases in FY21 occurred across all three sectors.

Multiple factors contributed to decreased pre-K enrollment in school year 2020-21. Unlike grades K-12, enrollment in pre-K is voluntary, and some parents may have been hesitant to enroll their children in pre-K during the 2020-21 school year due to concerns about COVID-19. At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, most LEAs, and some CBOs, were operating in a virtual posture and parents may also have been less interested in enrolling their pre-K students in virtual learning. More parents were at home during the pandemic, providing additional flexibility to personally supervise their children. Finally, the decrease in pre-K enrollment is likely due in part to demographic factors, as the number of births in the District peaked in 2016, and subsequent birth cohorts, which would include children entering pre-K in the 2020-21 school year, are smaller than preceding cohorts.¹⁷ It will be important to monitor pre-K enrollment in future years to better understand what portion of the decrease in enrollment in 2020-21 was due to pandemic-specific

¹⁷ See Office of Deputy Mayor for Education, *EdSight #23: After Years of Growth, Births Across DC Have Been Declining Since 2016* (May 2022), https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DME_EdSight%20Birth%20Trends%20%28FINAL%29.pdf.

factors, and likely transient, and what may be the result of longer-term demographic forces that CBOs, LEAs, and District policymakers should expect to persist.

Figure 2. Universal pre-K enrollment by sector from FY12 to FY21¹⁸



Children Served in Universal Pre-K Programs in DC

As previously noted, pre-K programs in the District served over 12,923 children in FY21. The children served by universal pre-K programs in the District are demographically diverse. Across the District, almost half of all children participating in public pre-K were identified as at-risk. The share of children identified as at-risk is between 40 and 50 percent across sectors, though public charter schools have a slightly higher rate of at-risk children in pre-K than other sectors. Nine percent of children in public pre-K in the District received special education services. Just over half of children enrolled in public pre-K were Black/African American, followed by White, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, two or more races, and Pacific

¹⁸ Enrollment data for DCPS and PCS are sourced from the 2020-21 School Year Enrollment Audit, while enrollment data for CBOs are sourced directly from subsidy enrollment data maintained by the Division of Early Learning.

Islander/Native Hawaiian, as outlined in Table 6. Approximately equal numbers of male and female students were enrolled in public pre-K across the District (see Table 6).

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of children enrolled in universal pre-K by sector

At-Risk¹⁹	DCPS		PCS		CBO		District-Wide	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	2,261	41%	3,094	48%	418	43%	5,773	45%
No	3,241	59%	3,348	52%	561	57%	7,150	55%
Race/Ethnicity	DCPS		PCS		CBO		District-Wide	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
American Indian/Alaskan Native	n<10	0%	14	0%	n<10	1%	25	0%
Asian	DS ²⁰	2%	DS	1%	DS	2%	244	2%
Black/African American	2,785	51%	4,589	71%	499	51%	7,873	61%
Hispanic/Latino	1,014	18%	625	10%	n<10	0%	1,639	13%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	n<10	0%	n<10	0%	n<10	0%	10	0%
Two or more races	200	4%	232	4%	14	1%	446	3%
White	1,358	25%	888	14%	440	45%	2,686	21%
Special Education	DCPS		PCS		CBO		District-Wide	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	DS	13%	DS	7%	DS	<1%	1,169	9%
No	DS	87%	DS	93%	DS	>99%	11,754	91%

¹⁹ A student is identified as at-risk for academic failure / economically disadvantaged if the student is identified as: (1) qualifying for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); (2) in the District’s foster care system; or (3) a student was ever identified as homeless.

²⁰ DS denotes Dual Suppression to protect personally identifiable information.

The Quality of Pre-K Programming

As the District’s state education agency (SEA), OSSE has oversight responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of pre-K programs in the District.²¹ The District has invested substantial resources to provide access to pre-K through a mixed delivery system that provides a range of options for families. Ensuring that all publicly funded pre-K programs meet a high standard of quality is essential to fully realize the benefits of these investments.

To this end, the District has adopted the CLASS Pre-K as the common measure of classroom quality across all three sectors of the mixed delivery system. CLASS Pre-K is a research-based observational measure that captures the quality of teacher-child interactions in preschool classrooms. Data from CLASS is used to monitor overall quality and progress across the mixed delivery system, support continuous improvement, and inform accountability for individual schools and CBOs. CLASS data is included in the District’s School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) framework for schools and the District’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for child development facilities.

CLASS is a tool designed to measure interactions between adults and children in early learning classrooms. Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the District determined that it was not feasible to administer CLASS observations for all programs in the 2020-21 school year, given that many programs remained in a virtual posture for most of the year and that health and safety guidance limited visitors from school buildings. However, OSSE provided CBOs and schools operating in-person pre-K classes the opportunity to receive feedback through voluntary CLASS observations conducted via video streaming. Participating pre-K programs were provided technology kits that allowed in-person classrooms to be observed virtually in real-time using video streaming. Twenty-two programs participated in the voluntary observations during the 2020-21 school year. These programs received program-level and classroom-level data from the observations to assist them in assessing professional development needs and possible impacts of COVID-19 on teacher-child interactions. OSSE is not publicizing this data due to the voluntary nature of participation and the limited sample size of the observations; however, OSSE will use it to inform internal decisions about professional development and other supports for pre-K programs during the District’s COVID-19 recovery.

Conclusion

As a result of strategic efforts made over the last 15 years, the District of Columbia has the most comprehensive system in the country for providing high-quality public pre-K and has prioritized early childhood investments to drive systemic educational improvement. Over the past two years, young children in the District have experienced unprecedented disruptions in their early care and education arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with implications for early learning and social-emotional development. Despite these challenges, the District has taken numerous steps to support young children, their families, and educators across the educational continuum through the pandemic and recovery. This includes providing

²¹ DC Code § 38–271.02(b)(5).

health and safety guidance and technical assistance to enable schools and child development facilities to operate safely and distributing PPE, test kits, and supplies to early learning programs across the mixed delivery system. The District is distributing over \$60 million in relief funds to help child development facilities remain in business through the pandemic and recovery and has provided guidance to help DCPS and PCS use federal ESSER funds to mitigate or prevent learning loss—including for the youngest learners. In addition, the District has increased funding for mental health supports in schools and child development facilities, which will help address the impacts of trauma and disrupted social-emotional learning for our youngest learners and their families.

While enrollment and utilization of universal pre-K decreased in the face of the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, the District maintained a focus on high-quality education services for 3- and 4-year-olds across the pre-K mixed-delivery system through a continuum of supports.

Moving forward, OSSE will continue to strategically invest federal and local dollars to provide LEAs and CBOs with resources, guidance, and supports to ensure providers are financially and physically healthy, as well as to enhance young children’s social-emotional learning and accelerate their comprehension of academic skills. OSSE is resuming observations of pre-K classrooms in January 2022, and in school year 2022-23, we will also resume collecting school readiness data through the Early Development Instrument in order to better understand how COVID-19 has affected learning and development outcomes for children transitioning from pre-K. By maintaining its long-standing commitments to pre-K access, quality, and choice for families, the District of Columbia can continue to support children on the path to success in school and beyond while the District recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.