



**MURIEL BOWSER**  
MAYOR

November 09, 2021

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Suite 504  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

I am pleased to submit to the Council of the District of Columbia the enclosed Fiscal Year 2020 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 Act of 2008, effective July 18, 2008 (D.C. Law 17-202; D.C. Official Code §38-271.05), this report highlights the District's progress towards providing high quality, universal preschool to three- and four-year-old children.

Overseen by 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 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 report presents data on enrollment and access to public pre-K programs. In FY 20, 78% of the District's estimated 3 and 4 year-olds were enrolled in universal pre-K. The report presents information on the implications of the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency on pre-K education services, and summarizes the ongoing response to the COVID-19 public health emergency to stabilize the education sector and to ensure equitable access to pre-K education for our youngest learners.

I am available to discuss any questions you may have regarding this report. In order to facilitate a response to your questions, please have your staff contact Justin Tooley, Deputy Chief of Staff, OSSE at (202)-215-3617.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Muriel Bowser".

Muriel Bowser

Enclosure



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

# FISCAL YEAR 2020 PRE-K REPORT

July 2021

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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. Of the District's estimated 17,568 three- and four-year-olds, 13,791 students (78%) were enrolled in one of the three sectors that compose the District's mixed delivery universal pre-K system: District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS); public charter schools, or community-based organizations (CBOs) through the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP)).

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 focuses on increasing access to high-quality early learning opportunities young children need to succeed in school and beyond. While increasing access is important, in order to realize the full benefits of the investment in universal pre-K, there must be continued focus on the quality of pre-K education and other early learning programs. The District has invested in several continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts to enhance pre-K quality and improve quality programming for young children, including offering professional development opportunities for early childhood educators and leaders, redesigning the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to focus on outcomes and CQI, and allocating funding to improve access to and support for quality programming.

To measure pre-K classroom quality, 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 observe pre-K classrooms for the 2019-20 school year. The District cancelled observations in accordance with public health guidance and as a result of many schools and CBOs cancelling in-person programming.

The District has worked to stabilize the education sector as part of the overall response to COVID-19. The fiscal year 2020 (FY20) pre-K report includes a new section on District-wide efforts to help DCPS, public charter schools, and CBOs provide high-quality pre-K programs and services that promote continual early learning and positive outcomes for pre-K students.

## Overview of Pre-K in the District of Columbia

It has been more than ten 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, has made early childhood education the centerpiece of its education reform agenda, and continues to outrank other states in both pre-K access and funding.

The District utilizes a mixed-delivery system for publicly funded pre-K, offering pre-K services in DCPS, public charter schools, and CBOs that have been designated as high-quality through the PKEEP. Pre-K is offered in 35 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and in 27 CBOs. Most DCPS elementary schools offer pre-K for age-eligible students that reside in the District, and public charter school sites that are approved to provide pre-K (by way of the school's charter) may offer pre-K to any student who meets the District's residency and age eligibility requirements.

Until 2020, Head Start services were provided in DCPS Title I public schools, and some public charter schools and some CBOs provide these services as well. Some CBOs provide early childcare and education services to three- and four-year-olds who are not a part of the District's universal pre-K program but may receive funding through the District's Subsidized Child Care Program. Childcare subsidies may be used to support CBO universal pre-K classrooms (through the PKEEP) to extend the educational day (supporting before and after care).

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

**Traditional Public Schools:** DCPS offers pre-K for four-year-olds in all of its elementary schools and 60 of the 78 (77%) of DCPS elementary schools also offer pre-K for three-year-olds. LEAs – which include both DCPS and charter LEAs – receive funding at the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) rate for children enrolling in the pre-K programs. In School Year 2019-20, as part of a school-wide Head Start model, DCPS provided comprehensive child and family support services in all its Title I schools in accordance with federal Head Start requirements.

**Public Charter Schools:** 34 PCS LEAs offer pre-K for three- and four-year-olds. In the District, these schools are authorized by the Public Charter School Board (PCSB). Public charter schools are public, taxpayer-funded, and open to all District of Columbia residents.

**Community-Based Organizations with one or more Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Classrooms:** Pursuant to the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008 (D.C. Official Code §38-272.01, *et. seq.*), OSSE established the PKEEP, which allocates funding at the UPSFF levels to CBOs to enhance high-quality pre-K education services in existing pre-K programs. CBOs must meet several requirements to participate in the PKEEP, including providing teacher training opportunities; achieving national accreditation;

maintaining a low adult-to-child ratio; implementing a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned with the District of Columbia Early Learning Standards; implementing valid and reliable assessments; meeting teacher qualification requirements; and increasing parent involvement, as well as providing coordinated services to families. In addition, according to 5-A DCMR § 3501.1(f), a CBO designated as high-quality and providing pre-K education services must pay teachers and assistant teachers wages equivalent to DCPS pre-K teachers based on years of experience. These CBOs are reimbursed for enrolled children at the same UPSFF rate as DCPS and public charter schools and also receive funding through the childcare subsidy program to provide year-round, extended-day services for eligible children.

## Other Publicly Funded Preschool Programs in the District

**Community-Based Organizations:** CBOs are private non-profit and for-profit businesses that provide full-day early care and education and may also provide before- and after-school services. In addition to tuition paid by families, some CBOs receive federal and local funds to provide these services to working families through the federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), via receipt of child care subsidy voucher payments. CCDBG funds are allocated to every state and the District of Columbia. Subsidy voucher payments can be used for childcare services, including before- and after-care.

**Head Start:** The Head Start program provides a federal-to-local early childhood funding stream. The District of Columbia has several grantees and delegate agencies providing Head Start services to eligible children and families living below poverty levels as determined by the poverty guidelines published by the federal government (in 2018, \$25,100 for a family of four). Children are also eligible if they are in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or if their families receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

During School Year 2019-20, DCPS was the largest Head Start provider in the District of Columbia, serving 6,088 children which represents an increase of 906 children from FY19. Through implementation of the Head Start School-Wide Model,<sup>1</sup> DCPS combined local dollars with federal Head Start dollars to offer early learning opportunities and comprehensive services consistent with the Head Start program model to all pre-K-aged children enrolled in Title I schools. A school was eligible to become a Title I school-wide program if forty percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. DCPS Head Start programs implemented one of two high-quality, research-based curricula, Tools of the Mind or The Creative Curriculum, in classrooms serving students enrolled in pre-K 3 and pre-K 4. Head Start teachers assessed children three times annually using a developmentally appropriate assessment, Teaching Strategies GOLD.

As of School Year 2020-21, DCPS's existing Cluster Support Model replaced the Head Start school-wide model in all pre-K classrooms. Under the Cluster Support Model, each cluster of schools is led by an instructional

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<sup>1</sup> District of Columbia Public Schools Early Childhood Education, <http://www.dcpsschoolbudgetguide.com/changes/ece.html>.

superintendent and supported by a team of dedicated central office staff. Resources and supports are differentiated across schools to give pre-K students furthest from opportunity access to the services that will enable them to enter kindergarten prepared for success.

Throughout FY20, the District expanded and aligned efforts of both Early Head Start and Head Start programs to better meet the needs of children from infancy through preschool age. Through this continuum of support, the District is focused on providing more young children access to high-quality early learning opportunities needed to succeed in school and beyond. Table 1 provides an illustration of the District's mixed-delivery system.

Table 1: Publicly funded pre-K programs at-a-glance

| Setting  | Universal Pre-K Program | Delivery System Overview   | Funding Source   |
|--|-------------------------|--|--|
| Traditional Public Schools                                     | Yes                     | DCPS provides publicly funded pre-K open to all District residents.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPSFF for students enrolled in pre-K classrooms.</li> <li>• Federal Head Start funding for Title I schools.</li> </ul>  |
| Public Charter Schools   | Yes                     | Public charter schools provide publicly funded pre-K open to all 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"> <li>• UPSFF for students enrolled in pre-K classrooms.</li> <li>• Through a partnership with the United Planning Organization, select public charter schools also receive federal Head Start funding to support pre-K programming.</li> </ul>                         |
| CBOs with Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program 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 District residents.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPSFF-level funding for students enrolled in pre-K classrooms.</li> <li>• Some programs receive Head Start funding from the federal government.</li> <li>• Public funding for eligible children through the District’s subsidized childcare program.</li> </ul> |
| Community-Based Organizations                                  | No                      | CBOs that offer full-day, year-round early care and education services that include pre-K-aged children, including before- and after-school.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public funding for eligible children through the District’s subsidized childcare program.</li> <li>• Some also receive funding through the federal Head Start program.</li> </ul>   |



## Implications of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

While the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the early care and education sector, the District demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that LEAs and CBOs reopen safely, continue to serve families that need early care and education, and remain solvent through the pandemic. Below are some of the changes to the District's universal pre-K program during COVID-19.

### Changes to Pre-K in the Spring of 2020

On March 11, 2020, Mayor Bowser issued Mayor's Order 2020-045 declaring the COVID-19 public health emergency. On March 13, OSSE strongly encouraged CBOs participating in the PKEEP to announce that students would not attend school facilities through March 31, 2020. On [March 18, 2020](#), DCPS updated students and families that distance learning would start on March 24, 2020 for all pre-k classes and other grade levels. DCPS prepared printed packets of materials for every grade level from pre-K through 8th grade and each graduation requirement course for 9-12th grade. On [March 31, 2020](#), the DC PCSB announced that in response to the Mayor's order to close schools due to COVID-19, public charter schools began to transition to digital learning platforms allowing students to receive instruction at home.

On May 12, 2020, OSSE released [Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program COVID-19 Closures Guidance](#) regarding the operating status and child outcome assessment requirements for providers participating in PKEEP. The guidance encouraged CBOs to follow DCPS operating status that extended closures for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year and ended the school year on May 29, 2020. In August 2020, OSSE issued additional [COVID-19 guidance](#) for CBOs participating in the PKEEP program for the 2020-21 school year. 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;
  - 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 the District of Columbia Public Schools; 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 the PKEEP COVID-19 Waiver Request Form, a standard template used to expedite review and approval of the waiver requests.

## Local Education Agency (LEA) Continuous Education and Recovery Plans

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. One expectation for each recovery plan was that all students have access to safe and supportive learning environments that also deliver rigorous content aligned to the standards to prepare students to succeed in school and life. The plans were publicly posted and OSSE asked LEAs to share the plans directly with families upon approval by OSSE (and upon approval by DC PCSB). LEAs had the flexibility to design continuous education and school recovery plans to best fit the school's individualized needs, but each plan had to include certain baseline requirements: be clear and complete; follow applicable laws and policies; and for public charter schools, align with the school's approved charters. In addition, all plans had to align with COVID-19 public health guidelines.

## The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act

On [March 27, 2020](#), the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Pub. Law 116-136) was signed into law as the first economic stimulus bill providing funding and flexibilities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. OSSE received a \$42 million CARES-Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) award. The [CARES-ESSER](#) award was used to issue emergency relief funds to LEAs to address the impact of COVID-19 on elementary and secondary schools, including providing distance learning and developing return and recovery plans. Federal provisions required states to issue 90 percent of CARES-ESSER funds to LEAs based on the Title I-A formula. OSSE recognized that COVID-19 impacted all public schools, including those that did not receive Title I-A funds and provided equivalent allocations for LEAs not eligible for funding from ESSER-CARES, including adult and early childhood public charter LEAs. Congress would later approve additional appropriations to support COVID-19 response efforts in Fiscal Year 2021.

## 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 pre-K through 3rd grade students. 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.

- [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.

The District supported DCPS pre-K teachers to implement remote learning through the following trainings offered in the spring of 2020:

1. Engaging families remotely;
2. Designing and implementing lesson plans using Canvas (online learning 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. DCPS developed a variety of virtual learning resources and materials and distributed them to DCPS teachers and families to support virtual learning.

## 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 2019 Office of Planning population estimates, there are 17,568 three- and four-year-olds living in the District of Columbia. During the 2019-20 school year, a total of 13,791 (78%) children were served in public pre-K in the District. Of these children, 6,435 were 3 years old and 7,356 were 4 years old. Enrollment in the District's Universal pre-K increased marginally from 13,768 in FY19 to 13,791 in FY20, representing a 0.2 percent increase in enrollment. However, the enrollment did not keep pace with population growth, as three- and four-year-old children in the District increased by 2.7% from FY19 to FY20, from 17,197 children to 17,568.

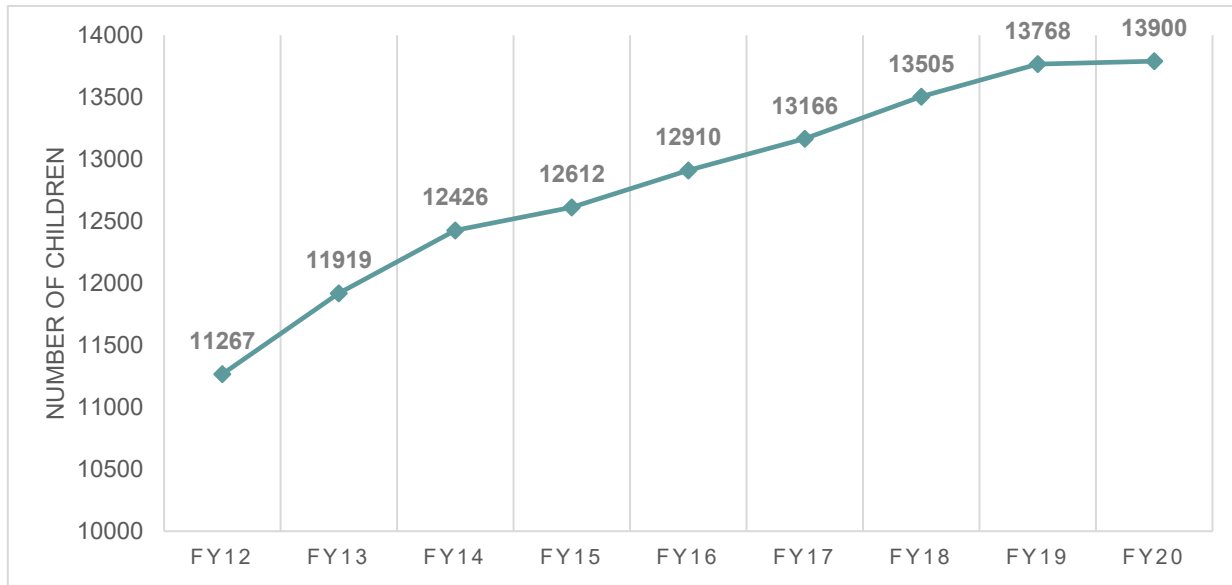
### Access to Universal Pre-K Programs in the District

The District continues to implement a mixed-delivery system for its Universal pre-K program to provide opportunities to participate in pre-K across all sectors, allowing choice and flexibility for families and those who provide pre-K services (e.g., providers and schools). In FY20, 152 sites in DC provided public pre-K. Of these, 63 sites were in DCPS, 62 sites were in public charter schools, and 27 sites were in CBOs.

## Enrollment in Universal Pre-K Over Time

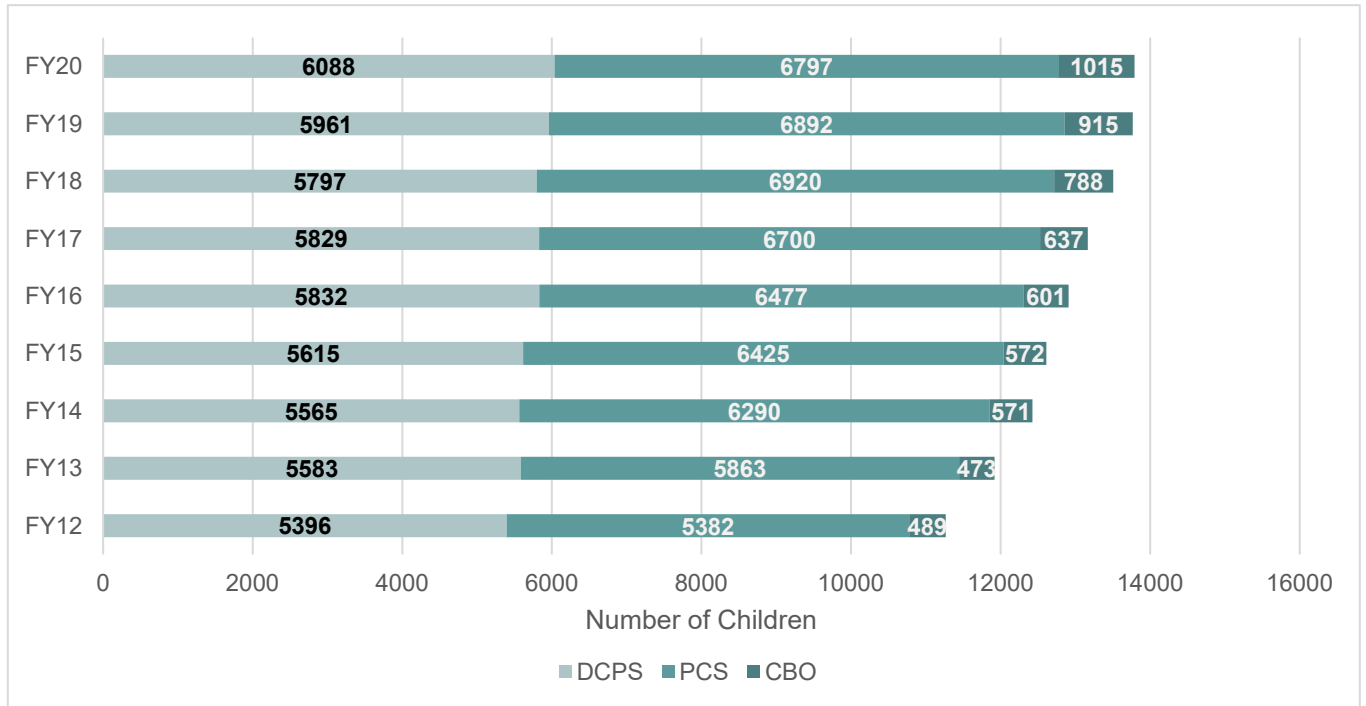
The District of Columbia has continued to increase enrollment in public pre-K programs. Over the past eight years, enrollment in public pre-K has increased 23.4 percent, from 11,267 in FY12 to 13,900 in FY20.

Figure 1. Universal pre-K enrollment from FY12 to FY20



Over time, growth in universal pre-K enrollment has been shared across all three sectors (see Figure 2). From FY12 to FY20, publicly funded pre-k enrollment increased by 640 children in DCPS, a 12 percent increase; 1,362 children in public charter schools, a 25 percent increase; and 522 children in PKEEP programs, a 107 percent increase. In the most recent years, growth has been concentrated in DCPS and CBOs while enrollment in public charter schools has declined. From FY19 to FY20, DCPS experienced a 2.1 percent increase in enrollment, from 5,961 children in FY19 to 6,088 children in FY20; public charter schools enrollment declined from 6,892 children in FY19 to 6,797 in FY20, a 1.4 percent decrease; and CBOs enrollment increased from 915 children to 1,015 children, a 11 percent increase (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Universal pre-K enrollment by sector from FY12 to FY20<sup>2</sup>



Enrollment in universal pre-k is lowest in wards 2 and 3 and highest in Ward 8. This trend is reflected in DCPS and PCS enrollment, which both have their lowest enrollment totals in Wards 2 and 3, while PKEEP enrollment is lowest in Ward 6 (see Table 2).

<sup>2</sup> Enrollment data for DCPS and PCS are sourced from the 2019-20 School Year Enrollment Audit, while enrollment data for CBOs are sourced directly from subsidy enrollment data maintained by the Division of Early Learning.

Table 2. FY20 Universal pre-k enrollment by Ward<sup>3</sup>

| Ward  | PKEEP | DCPS | PCS  | Total |
|-------|-------|------|------|-------|
| 1     | 309   | 535  | 275  | 1119  |
| 2     | DS    | 313  | n<10 | 329   |
| 3     | DS    | 351  | n<10 | 480   |
| 4     | 144   | 1146 | 751  | 2041  |
| 5     | 84    | 522  | 2117 | 2723  |
| 6     | n<10  | 1353 | DS   | 1961  |
| 7     | 88    | 873  | 1238 | 2199  |
| 8     | 245   | 995  | 1808 | 3048  |
| Total | 1015  | 6088 | 6797 | 13900 |

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<sup>3</sup> Exact figures for small enrollment numbers are suppressed to protect personally identifiable information of students. DS stands for dual suppression and figures are suppressed under this protocol to prevent reconstruction of suppressed data.

## The Quality of Pre-K Programming

With such a substantial investment and myriad of service delivery options for pre-K, a commitment to quality is critical to fully realize the benefits of early childhood education in the District.

At the federal level, the Head Start Reauthorization Act; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA);<sup>4</sup> and the Child Care Development Block Grant<sup>5</sup> mandate the implementation of program quality assessments and evaluations that expand the focus of state systems to include instructional quality in early care and education programs. Thus, the District's focus on measuring classroom quality is critical for ensuring that programs are implementing high-quality pre-K in all sectors. OSSE has oversight responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of pre-K programs in the District.<sup>6</sup>

OSSE uses the CLASS pre-K to measure classroom quality in all sectors across the District. CLASS is a research-based observational measure that captures the quality of teacher-child interactions in preschool classrooms. Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, however, the District's Pre-K providers were not observed with CLASS for the 2019-20 school year. The District cancelled observations in accordance with public health guidance.

## Conclusion

As a result of strategic efforts made over the last decade, the District of Columbia has positioned itself as a national leader in the provision of high-quality pre-K and has made early childhood a centerpiece of its education reform agenda. Given the unprecedented challenges and effects of COVID-19 on the District's early care and education sector, the District continues to increase capacity across the pre-K mixed-delivery system to ensure three- and four-year-olds receive quality early education services. The District will continue to provide resources, guidance and supports related to COVID-19 on cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting classrooms; supporting families in learning at home; supporting families on non-learning matters; and supporting children's learning and positive social, emotional growth and development.

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<sup>4</sup> Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 Sec. 1431.

<sup>5</sup> Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-186 § 128 Stat. 1999.

<sup>6</sup> DC Code § 38-271.02(b)(5).