





This project has been four years in development, and we thank the many people who contributed along the way. Makada Henry-Nickie conducted the webscrape with Hao Sun. Betsy Wolf's "Data for DC" project provided crucial multi-year data about the DC schools. Samantha Elizondo, Curtlyn Kramer, Gavin Downing, Mohammed Memfis, Nicolas Smith, and Kennedy Teel provided research assistance. We received extremely helpful feedback on earlier drafts of the paper from Audrey Reese, Richard Reeves, Erin Roth, and Jon Valant. All errors are the authors' own.

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# Introduction

Even as the nation has grown more diverse, American public schools remain racially segregated.<sup>1</sup> Economic segregation in education is also on the rise.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, new attention has been brought to the role that upper-middle-class white parents living in diverse metropolitan areas have played in reinforcing segregation in their local school systems.<sup>3</sup> The demographics of a school’s student population, particularly the racial and economic status of students, strongly influence parents’ perceptions of school quality.<sup>4</sup> White families generally avoid schools with high percentages of minority students,<sup>5</sup> and some actively resist plans that would integrate schools.<sup>6</sup>

While informal comments from peers are known to be an important factor in parents’ decisionmaking about schools,<sup>7</sup> we have little quantitative data about how this information is filtered through these parents’

networks, how bias and misinformation operate within them, and how parents communicate with each other about school quality. Using data from the online parent forum, “DC Urban Moms and Dads” (commonly known as “DC Urban Moms”) and publicly available Washington, D.C., school data, this paper explores how an online community, one that appears to be dominated by privileged parents, discusses its local school system. As the title

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Much of the local school system is simply invisible; many schools are never discussed.

suggests, we examine what kind of schools these parents see as “best” for their kids, and how they go about ensuring that their idea of “best” is what their kids receive.

The conversations in the “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” forum shine a light on the mechanisms of segregation in the District’s public education system. We find that in DC Urban Moms’ conversations, schools are clustered—by grade, geography, and sector, but also by the racial makeup of the student body. These different school clusters are discussed using different terminology. We also find that within the DC Urban Moms’ forum much of the local school system is simply invisible; many schools are never discussed. Instead, a small fraction of the school system—generally, schools with a sizeable white population and schools in wealthy or gentrifying neighborhoods—receive an outsized share of attention. The correlation between attention to a school and its racial demographics persists, even within a gentrifying neighborhood.

A case study suggests that the release of a new system of official data on school quality did not alter these patterns. Finally, a great deal of the activity on the forum is dedicated to discussing how to leverage the District's complex school choice system to ensure that one's children are in one of the small number of public schools deemed acceptable, a process that reinforces the District's geographic and educational segregation.

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## Public Education in the Nation's Capital

Public education in the District includes a system of traditional public schools and a system of public charter schools; in 2018–19, these schools served over 90,000 students at 182 schools.<sup>8</sup> The city is highly diverse, as is the incoming school-age population. Among children under five, 48 percent are Black, 27 percent are white non-Hispanic, and 17 percent are Hispanic.<sup>9</sup> 54 percent of the city's public school students are in traditional (DCPS) public schools, while 46 percent are in public charter schools (DCPCS). All students have the right to attend their local public school, or they can enter a lottery for a seat at another traditional public school or public charter school.<sup>10</sup>

In practice, parents' school choices are limited. Housing in Washington is strongly segregated by race and class, with popular schools generally located in expensive or rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup> Housing prices in the District are high and rising, and affordable housing is in exceptionally short supply.<sup>12</sup> The District's school system does not provide regular school bus transportation; children can ride public transit to school for free, but commutes can be long, and it is often impractical for working parents to accompany young children to a school that is far from home.<sup>13</sup> Most students attend a school in their own wards, with students in poorer parts of the city facing longer commutes.<sup>14</sup>

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In making decisions about where to send their children to school, parents (and especially more privileged parents) are key contributors to school segregation and inequality.

Even for parents willing or able to enroll their children far from home, there remain fewer options than might first appear. The most popular traditional public schools rarely have spaces available to students who live beyond the school's catchment area. Popular charter schools often have waitlists of hundreds of students.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, researching the schools available via the lottery requires time and resources; school lottery waitlists are dominated by families that are more socioeconomically privileged.<sup>16</sup>

In making decisions about where to send their children to school, parents (and especially more privileged parents) are key contributors to school segregation and inequality. As the District of Columbia Auditor's office has stated, "there is a pattern of District families moving away from schools with more students considered at-risk<sup>17</sup> to schools with fewer students considered at-risk. These moves are facilitated by the robust choice model in DC."<sup>18</sup>

## About the Data

DC Urban Moms has been a very active website for District parents since 2007. The website started as a mailing list in 2002 and was launched as a website in 2007.<sup>19</sup> Currently, the site contains 55 forums on subjects from religion to real estate to pets, but many of the most active forums pertain to education. Eleven of the forums are devoted to schooling, including “DC Public and Public Charter Schools,” “Montgomery County Public Schools,” and “Private/Independent Schools.” The education forums have a total of nearly 3 million messages.<sup>20</sup>

While the anonymity of the site prevents us from developing a comprehensive picture of participants, the data suggest that many of those active in DC Urban Moms forums are highly privileged. Across all forums, the zip codes most commonly referred to on DC Urban Moms are 20016, 20015, and 20007, the three most expensive zip codes in the District.<sup>21</sup> These three zip codes make up almost one-third of all District zip codes referenced. Given the District’s residential segregation, it is also likely that the participants in DC Urban Moms are substantially whiter than the city as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

Qualitative evidence reinforces the perception that many DC Urban Moms participants are upper-middle-class professionals with substantial wealth. In one conversation titled “Poll: Your Next Car,” the average sticker price of the cars named was \$37,800.<sup>23</sup> Of course, we cannot entirely discount the possibility that some of the participants in the DC Urban Moms community are providing aspirational, rather than accurate, pictures of their financial well-being. But many of the conversations on the site suggest a deep familiarity, not just with the objects of conspicuous consumption, but the more humdrum economic concerns of the upper-middle class. A recent conversation on the “Money and Finances” forum was a lengthy and well-informed discussion of the prospects for the repeal of the \$10,000 cap on the state and local tax deduction.<sup>24</sup> There may well be substantial variation in the economic circumstances of DC Urban Moms participants, and also variation between those who comment and those who merely read the site. Overall, however, the conversations that occur on DC Urban Moms forums appear to be between people who live in economic comfort.

The forums are structured in the standard manner for online message boards, with community members able to post a new topic or respond to existing conversations. For example, a recent conversation, “WaPo: How D.C. and its teachers, with shifting plans and demands, failed to reopen schools,” contained over 275 messages, while another, “Does Latin accept 8th graders,” had only nine messages. Within a conversation, replies are threaded; participants can respond to the initial message or respond to other responses. Almost all commenters reply anonymously.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 1: Sample of a Conversation Posted to the “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” Forum**

Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?

postreply Forum Index » DC Public and Public Charter Schools

Author	Message
12/14/2020 13:16	<p><b>Subject:</b> Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?</p> <p><b>Anonymous</b> Thinking ahead to next year and should schools reopen we will have three separate schools involved due to grade levels and our middle schooler is not comfortable (as of right now) walking home alone after school and doesn't have a core group of friends that have been together for years and walk together either.</p> <p>I'm pleased with in boundary option but would also consider lottery for a middle school with daily after school options.</p> <p>Are there any?</p>
12/14/2020 13:24	<p><b>Subject:</b> Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?</p> <p><b>Anonymous</b> Deal has some activities but they end at 4pm.</p>
12/14/2020 13:25	<p><b>Subject:</b> Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?</p> <p><b>Anonymous</b> Also---they don't start at the beginning of the year. So they can't be used as daily childcare until a few weeks in and it will also be difficult to patch together something for every night of the week. I'm not sure you're going to find a middle school that offers actual aftercare.</p>

The following analysis focuses on the forum “DC Public and Public Charter Schools”; all data that follows refers to this one forum. The dataset includes all posts between its launch in 2008 and April 2020, a total of over 15,000 conversations and 400,000 messages.<sup>26</sup> The median number of messages per conversation in this forum is fourteen. Peak activity for “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” was in 2014 and 2015, with over 2,000 new conversations started in each of those years.<sup>27</sup> The forum remains extremely active, with an average of more than 1,300 new conversations a year since 2016.

Within each conversation, we identified the schools that were mentioned.<sup>28</sup> Overall, 78 percent of conversation threads mentioned at least one school. The median number of schools mentioned in a thread is two, while the average is just below five.

We also searched for over 500 keywords that help capture the substance of the discussion.<sup>29</sup> These keywords cover a wide array of topics, including basic vocabulary like “middle school” or “pre-k”; terms for the school assignment process, such as “lottery” and “boundaries”; words for the governing institutions associated with the school system, such as the “mayor”; words related to housing and the District’s neighborhoods; as well as common adjectives like “best” or “happy.”<sup>30</sup>



Of particular note are the words that refer to features of schools and the children who attend them. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the frequency of some of the most common words associated directly with the schools and their students.

**Table 1: What Features of Schools are Discussed?**

Category (examples of included terms)	Number of Conversations (%)
<b>Staff</b> (“principal” or “teacher”)	7357 (48.4%)
<b>Subjects</b> (“art”, “math”, or “science”)	6269 (41.2%)
<b>Extracurriculars</b> (“football” or “band”)	4632 (30.4%)
<b>Language Programs</b> (“dual language” or “immersion”)	3882 (25.5%)
<b>Facilities</b> (“after care”, “library”, or “playground”)	3723 (24.5%)
<b>Buildings</b> (“air conditioning” or “renovation”)	2607 (17.1%)
<b>Advanced Programs</b> (“AP” or “honors”)	2348 (15.4%)
<b>Discipline</b> (“tardy” or “suspension”)	2142 (14.1%)
<b>Safety</b> (“police”, “violence”, or “drugs”)	1526 (10.0%)
<b>Size</b> (“class size” or “overcrowded”)	812 (5.3%)

**Table 2: What Words are Used to Describe the School Population?**

Category (examples of included terms)	Number of Conversations (%)
<b>Involvement</b> (“engaged” or “committed”)	5457 (35.9%)
<b>Race</b> (“Black”, “African-American”, or “white”)	4545 (29.9%)
<b>Achievement</b> (“high-achieving” or “underperforming”)	4320 (28.4%)
<b>Income</b> (“Affluent” “low SES”)	4015 (26.4%)
<b>Behavior</b> (“disruptive” or “troubled”)	2997 (19.7%)
<b>Special Education</b> (“special needs” or “disability”)	1655 (10.9%)
<b>Language</b> (“ELL” or “English speaking”)	1588 (10.4%)
<b>At-Risk</b> (“at risk” or “disadvantaged”)	1328 (8.7%)

We can then connect the keywords to the schools that are discussed in any given conversation. For example, in Figure 1, there is a reference to Alice Deal Middle School, as well as references to school boundaries, the lottery, middle school, and aftercare.

We also linked the schools to publicly available data sources. Our analyses rely on demographic data, including student race, at-risk student population, and students receiving free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL), originally collected by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). These data were compiled and made available to us by education researcher Dr. Betsy Wolf.<sup>31</sup> To these data, we add 2018–19 PARCC and STAR Framework data, which also come from OSSE, and 2018–19 school waitlist data from DCPS and DCPCS.<sup>32</sup>

# Which Public Schools are Discussed on DC Urban Moms? Which Schools are Ignored?

In principle, a District parent could research scores of schools, each with countless attributes to consider, and compare all of these options when choosing a school for their child. In practice, however, most parents would find such a strategy impractical, and instead seriously consider a far shorter list of schools. The median number of schools listed by families participating in the school lottery is four.<sup>33</sup>

The first question, then, is simply what schools are given any consideration whatsoever. Among DC Urban Moms participants, we find that some schools receive very high levels of attention, some schools are rarely mentioned at all, and that certain groups of schools tend to be discussed together.

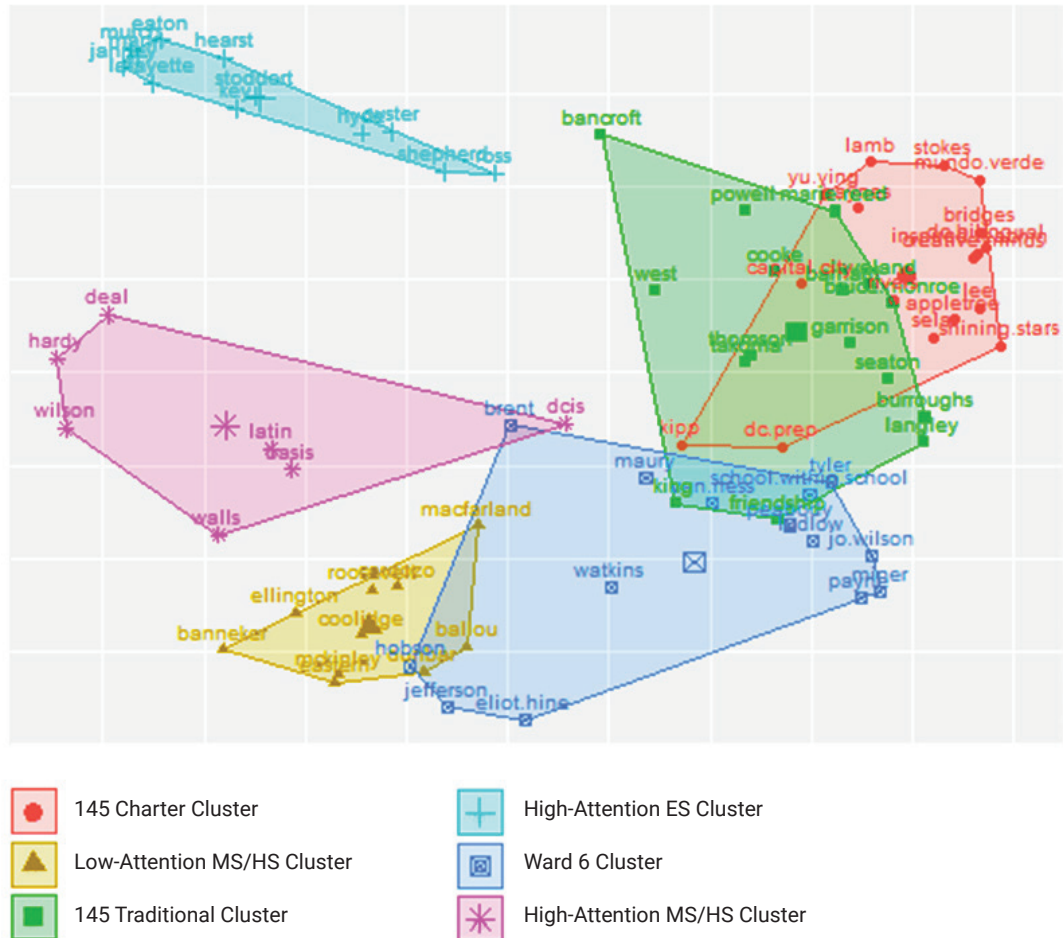
## School Clusters

We begin by examining the clusters of schools that appear in DC Urban Moms conversations. If a DC Urban Moms participant mentions a particular school, what other schools are also likely to be a part of the discussion? Understanding networks of District schools as they present themselves within the forum reveals the mental map of public education held by this community.

For every pair of schools in our dataset, we calculated how often they are mentioned in the same DC Urban Moms conversation, measured as a percentage of all the conversations that mention either of the two schools.<sup>34</sup> We then used a clustering algorithm to identify groups of schools that are commonly discussed together.<sup>35</sup> For this first analysis, we were obliged to focus on the 76 schools appearing in at least 2 percent of all conversations in the forum; we will refer to these schools as “commonly discussed.” Other schools appear too sporadically to form a cluster of conversations. We return to the important subject of rarely discussed schools in the following section.

Figure 2 summarizes the results of the clustering. Though the analysis was based exclusively on the frequency with which schools were referenced together on the DC Urban Moms forum, the results reveal clear patterns in terms of sector, location, and grade level. For instance, four of the clusters primarily or exclusively contain elementary schools (ES), while the other two clusters contain almost all of the commonly discussed middle (MS) and high schools (HS).<sup>36</sup>

Figure 2: School Clusters in DC Urban Moms Forum Conversations



In the top left of the figure is the “High-Attention ES Cluster,” which includes twelve traditional public elementary schools in the wealthy neighborhoods of Wards 2 and 3, plus two other elementary schools also zoned for Alice Deal Middle School and Woodrow Wilson High School. This cluster is very frequently discussed on DC Urban Moms, appears isolated from the other clusters, meaning that its schools tend to be discussed separately from other schooling options in the District.<sup>37</sup> In the bottom right of the figure is the “Ward 6 Cluster,” which includes fourteen traditional public elementary and middle schools located in Ward 6, a diverse set of neighborhoods around the U.S. Capitol.

The other four clusters are logically understood as sets of two. First, there are the two “145” clusters that include schools in Wards 1, 4, and 5. Second, there are the two middle school/high school clusters.

The “145” Clusters overlap in the top right of Figure 2, and what is true visually is also true geographically. The 145 Charter Cluster includes seventeen charter schools in Wards 1, 4, and 5, neighborhoods that have in recent years experienced substantial gentrification. The 145 Traditional Cluster includes sixteen traditional public schools in these same neighborhoods.<sup>38</sup> The overlap of the clusters shows the extent to which the charter and traditional public schools in these areas are discussed together; these two clusters are far less distinct than the others. Nonetheless, the charter school cluster experiences a substantially higher level of discussion than the traditional school cluster.

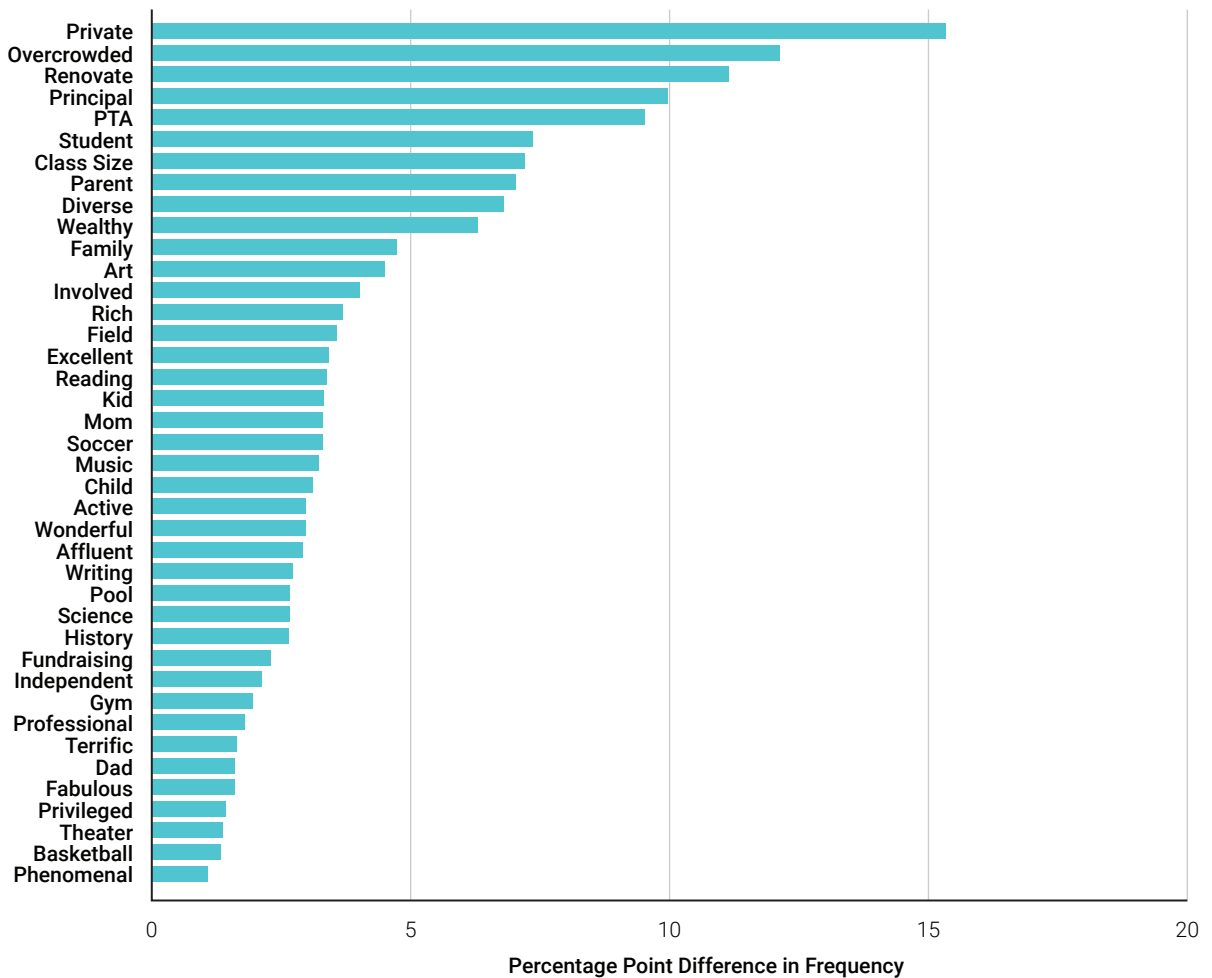
Finally, on the bottom left of Figure 2 are the two middle school/high school clusters. The “High-Attention MS/HS Cluster” and the “Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster” include most of the middle and high schools in the District. In the High-Attention MS/HS Cluster are four traditional public schools and three public charter schools, all located in the Northwest quadrant of the city. Of all the clusters, this cluster shows the highest level of discussion activity on DC Urban Moms. The Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster includes ten other public middle and high schools in the District, but has the lowest level of discussion activity among all clusters.

Unlike the other clusters, the High-Attention and Low-Attention MS/HS Clusters are not distinct by sector or by geography; instead, these clusters appear to be distinguished by the demography of the students. For instance, the Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster includes Duke Ellington School of the Arts, a selective arts school located in wealthy Ward 2, like many of the High-Attention MS/HS schools. Nor does attention coincide with standard measures of school quality. The Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster includes Benjamin Banneker, a selective and academically rigorous magnet school, as well as schools that have low graduation rates and relatively few students testing at grade level. What the clustering algorithm appears to have detected is the racial segregation among DC’s middle and high schools. The High-Attention MS/HS Cluster contains only schools that have a greater than 15 percent white population, with an average of 30 percent of students being white. The Low-Attention MS/HS cluster contains only schools with a less than 15 percent white population, and an average of less than two percent of students being white.

In addition to being discussed separately, the schools in the six clusters are also discussed differently. By looking at what terms are especially common when schools in each cluster are discussed, we can trace the contours of those conversations. Figure 3 examines terms associated with the High Attention ES cluster, as compared to other commonly discussed elementary schools.

Discussions of schools in the High-Attention ES cluster are more likely to use words like “affluent” and to refer to “fundraising” for the school. More than conversations about other elementary schools, High-Attention ES Cluster conversations tend to involve superlatives, like “excellent” and to refer to individuals associated with the school such as “families,” “moms,” and “kids.” These discussions also refer to many specific school facilities and subjects and discuss class size and private school options.

**Figure 3: Selected Terms Associated with High-Attention Elementary Schools Compared to Other Commonly-Discussed Elementary Schools**



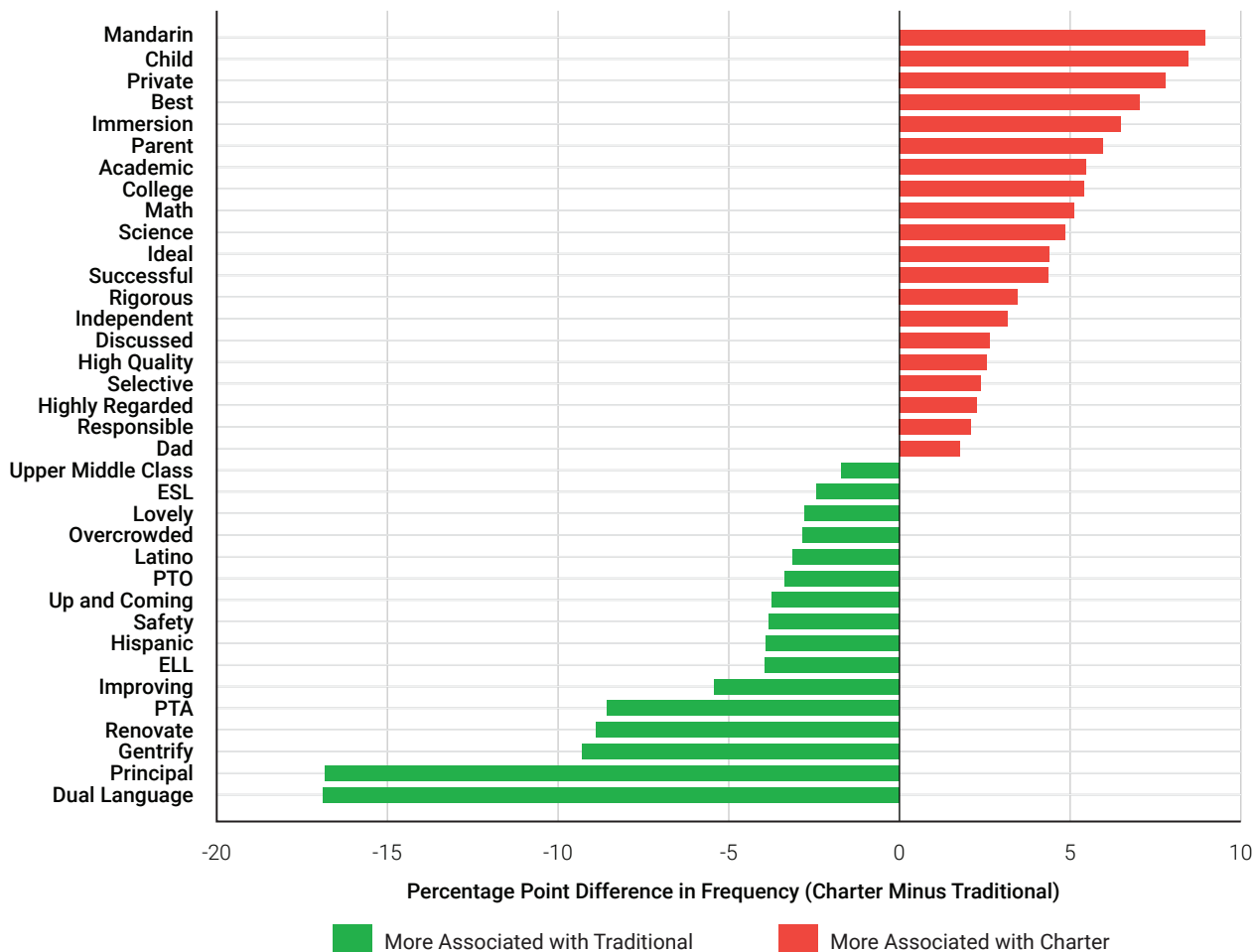
Other than the references to affluence and perhaps the high number of positive descriptors, the words associated with the High-Attention ES cluster might not seem particularly extraordinary. Recall, however, that these are not simply common, substantive words used when these schools are discussed; they are the words used especially often *compared to conversations about schools in the other elementary school clusters*. That is to say, conversations about other elementary schools are less likely to mention subjects like art, reading, music, or science; less likely to mention extracurriculars like soccer or basketball; and less likely to talk about the people at the school using terms like family, children, or moms.

The comparable data for the Ward 6 cluster, for example, look very different. Discussions of this cluster are especially likely to include terms that signify race and class, including “high SES [socioeconomic status],” “low SES,” “middle class,” “Black,” “white,” and “gentrifying,” among others. Despite these many terms that describe demographic groups of people, there is an absence of words like “moms” or “kids” or “children” that appear on the High-Attention ES list. There are also few terms associated with school subjects, extracurriculars, or facilities.

What about the 145 Clusters, and the two MS/HS clusters? Since these four clusters form logical groups of two, it is informative to compare each of these clusters directly to its counterpart.

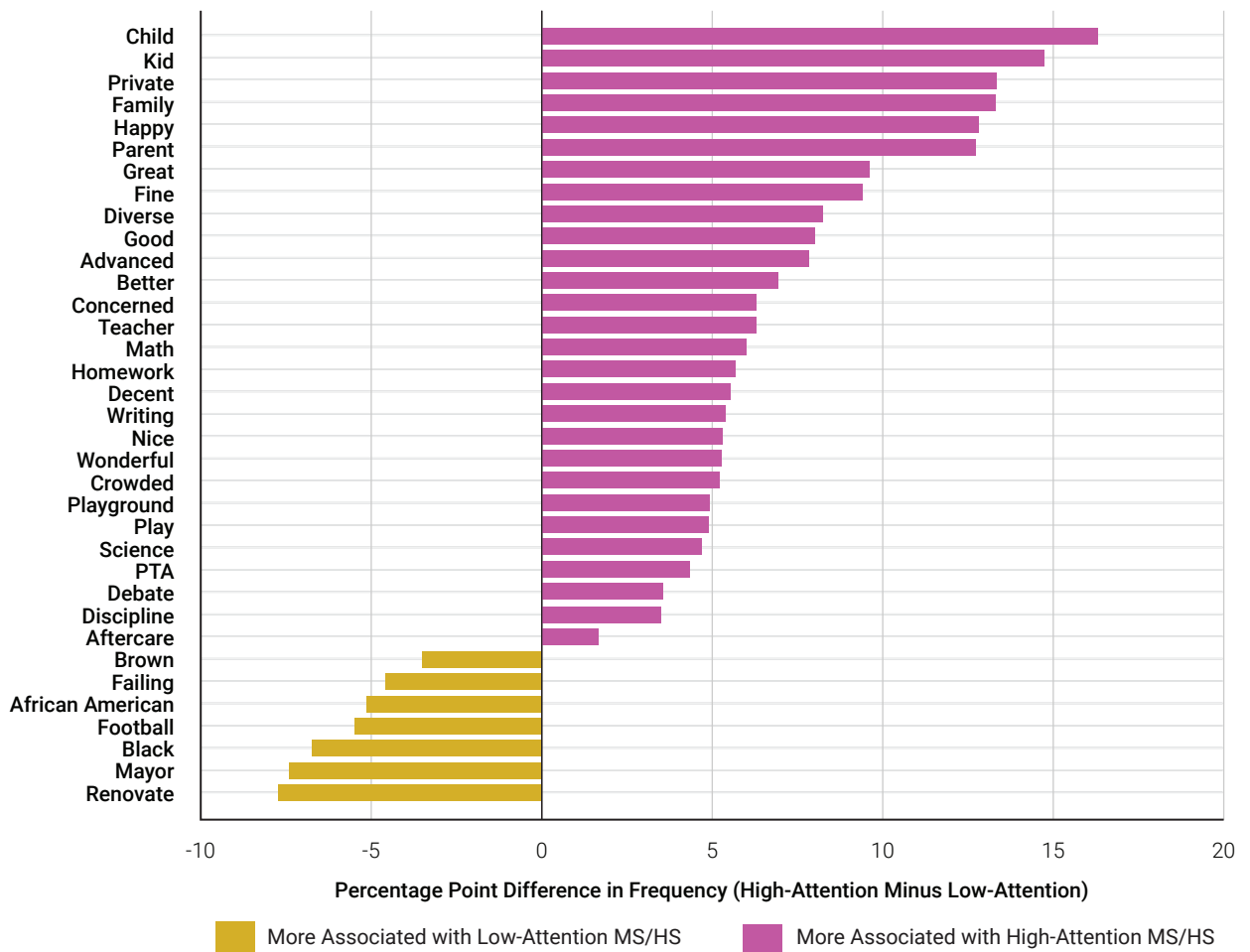
Figure 4 compares the two clusters in Wards 1, 4, and 5. Both the charter and the traditional cluster have a number of bilingual and language immersion schools, and so it is no surprise that conversations about these clusters have especially frequent references to language, though conversations about the charter sector more often use the word “immersion,” while the conversations about the traditional schools use “dual-language.” The 145 Traditional Cluster is more associated with references to ethnicity (e.g., “Hispanic” and “Latino”), while the Charter Cluster has terms for individuals, such as “child” and “parent.” Discussion of the 145 Traditional Cluster also features higher levels of attention to “safety.” The 145 Charter Cluster is associated with more words like “ideal” and “highly regarded,” whereas the traditional public schools are associated with words like “improving” and “up-and-coming.”

**Figure 4: Selected Terms Associated with the 145 Charter Cluster or the 145 Traditional Cluster**



The final two clusters are those that include the District’s high schools. When the High-Attention MS/HS Cluster is discussed on DC Urban Moms, participants use different words than when they discuss schools in the Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Selected Terms Associated with the High- or Low-Attention Middle and High School Clusters**



High-Attention MS/HS Cluster schools are associated with terms referring to academics, as well as many general positive descriptors. As with the High-Attention ES cluster, these discussions are also especially likely to refer to the people at the school: “children” and “families.” The word “diverse” is also especially associated with the High-Attention MS/HS Cluster. Far fewer common terms are more associated with discussions of Low-Attention MS/HS Cluster schools. These words include “Black,” “African-American,” “football,” “failing,” and “renovate.”



## Individual Schools

Turning to the individual schools, we again find large differences of attention and strong correlations between how schools are discussed and the demographics of the student population.

Most striking is the near-invisibility of a very substantial percentage of the District's public school system. Nearly half of the public schools in the District are almost never mentioned on DC Urban Moms. 75 schools appear in an average of less than one percent of forum conversations annually. These rarely mentioned schools are also given very little individual attention. In fact, the most rarely mentioned schools often appear on DC Urban Moms when a participant has copied and pasted into the forum a document from an official source (such as a press release or data table) that contains the names of many District schools.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 6 shows the negative correlation between how often a school is discussed, and how many other schools are mentioned in the same conversation. Many of the most frequently discussed schools are those that appear in the High-Attention ES and High-Attention MS/HS clusters, such as Alice Deal, Woodrow Wilson, Janney, Washington Latin or BASIS DC. These schools also tend to appear in conversations with few references to other schools.

**Figure 6: Number of Conversations Mentioning a School vs. Average Number of Other Schools Mentioned**

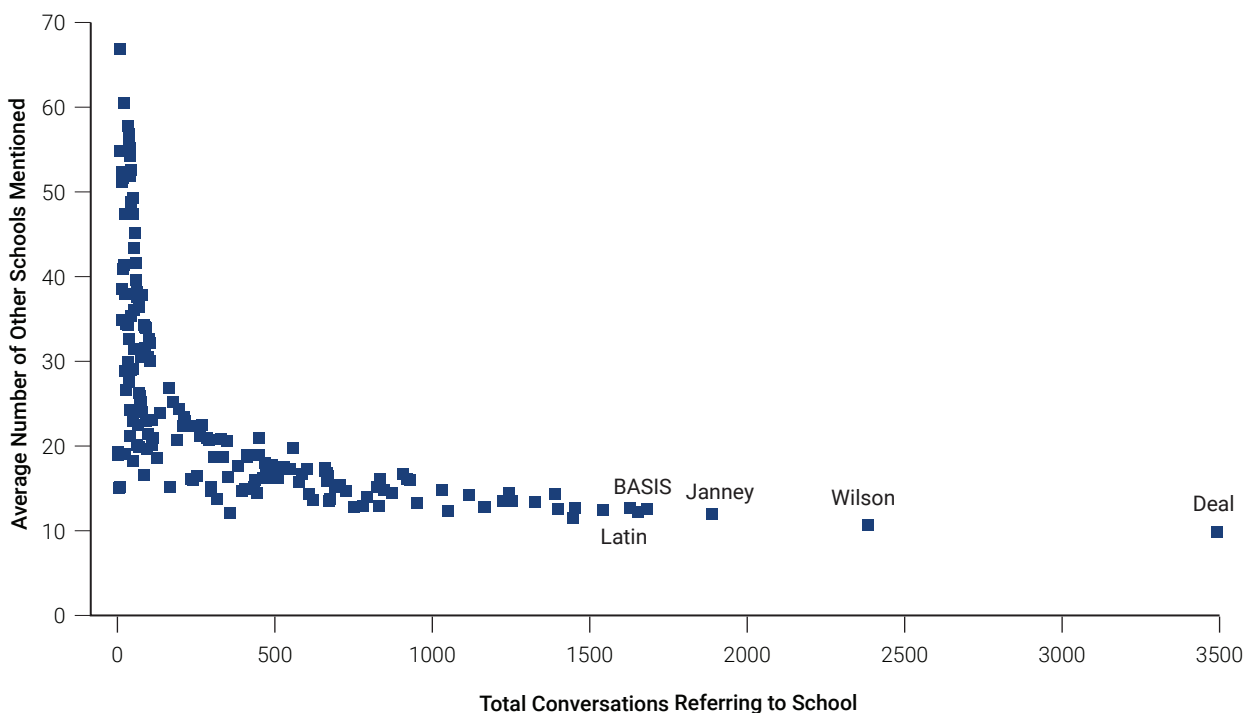


Figure 6 summarizes the stark differences in attention schools receive on the DC Urban Moms forum. In the previous section, we discussed the clusters of “commonly-mentioned” schools, those appearing in two percent or more of the 15,213 conversations in our dataset. But, as Figure 6 attests, some schools are mentioned in much more than two percent of DC Urban Mom conversations, and many schools are mentioned in far fewer conversations. We define a school as “frequently mentioned” if it is mentioned in, on average, more than five percent of conversations a year. We define a school as “rarely mentioned” if it appears, on average, in less than one percent of conversations a year.<sup>40</sup>

Rarely-mentioned schools have student bodies that are almost entirely Black, while frequently-mentioned schools have large white populations. Rarely-mentioned schools also have higher rates of poverty, lower test scores, and higher percentages of students in special education. The frequency of mentions on the DC Urban Moms website also correlates with a real-world indicator of school popularity—the length of a school’s waitlist.<sup>41</sup> Table 3 summarizes these findings.

**Table 3: Differences Between Rarely-Mentioned and Frequently-Mentioned Schools<sup>42</sup>**

Category	Rarely-Mentioned Schools	Frequently-Mentioned Schools
	Mentioned in <1% of Conversations (n=76)	Mentioned in >5% of Conversations (n=33)
White	0.4%	40%
Black	92%	32%
Hispanic	7%	18%
At-Risk	68%	14%
Meeting or Exceeding English Language Standards	18%	66%
Meeting or Exceeding Math Standards	13%	60%
Special Education	16%	9%
Charter	35	12
Traditional	41	21
Elementary	44	23
Middle	8	5
High	9	3
Waitlist Length	90	732

Other aspects of the schools show fewer differences. The frequently- and rarely- mentioned schools are similarly divided among elementary, middle and high schools. The rarely-mentioned schools are nearly evenly split between charter and traditional schools; frequently-mentioned schools include a higher fraction of traditional public schools, but about one-third of these schools are charters.

Looking over time, we find that there is substantial stability in which schools receive frequent attention on DC Urban Moms. The major change over the period is the founding of charter schools that receive high levels of attention. For instance, charter schools such as BASIS DC (founded 2012) and Lee Montessori (founded 2014) have each been mentioned in at least five percent of DC Urban Mom conversations every year since their respective openings. What is not common, however, is for a school to go from low levels of attention to high levels of attention. In fact, excluding schools that opened or reopened during the period, only six schools that appeared in an average of less than two percent of conversations annually before 2015 were discussed in an average of more than three percent of conversations annually after 2016.

In thinking about why some schools are given consideration by participants on DC Urban Moms, it is difficult to disentangle geographic segregation from school segregation. No schools located only in Wards 7 and 8, the heavily Black wards east of the Anacostia River, are among the schools frequently discussed on DC Urban Moms.<sup>43</sup> None of the rarely-mentioned schools are in Wards 2 or 3, the wealthiest and whitest wards in the District.<sup>44</sup> School segregation, in general and as it is evidenced by the conversations on the DC Urban Moms forums, reflects the history of racist housing and education policy in the United States.<sup>45</sup>

However, as the clustering of high schools suggests, and as we will see in the following section, geographic segregation alone does not entirely explain how and which schools are discussed by DC Urban Moms participants. Nonetheless, neighborhoods of residence play a critical role in a primary activity of the “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” forum: strategizing how to get access to a set of schools deemed desirable.

## Location, Location, Lottery: DC Urban Moms and Strategies to “Win” School Assignment

DC Urban Moms participants generally approach the school system from a consumer perspective:<sup>46</sup> They ask for guidance from others about which schools are preferable and seek out advice about how to increase one’s chances of accessing those schools. In other words, a great deal of the conversation on DC Urban Moms is about where to live and what schools to seek through the lottery. The centrality of school choice to the forum is evident in the monthly ebb and flow of activity on the site; nearly 50 percent of all new conversations are posted in the first four months of the calendar year, when parents are choosing schools for the fall.

On the forum, the process of decisionmaking is often fraught. School choice is not generally described by DC Urban Moms participants as a system of matching, in which people with different preferences each find a school that meets their specifications. Rather, school assignment is often treated as a high-stakes, zero-sum game, with clear winners and losers. The disparities in the District’s education system are indeed stark, due to the high levels of economic inequality and segregation, as well as inequities in funding.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the language on the site can be extreme. “Let the Hunger Games BEGINNNNNN!” writes one commenter in a 2015 thread, comparing the school lottery to a fictional dystopia in which children are forced to fight to the death.<sup>48</sup>

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Many school assignments are deemed unacceptable outcomes to DC Urban Moms participants; it is common to consider opting out of the District’s school system entirely.

Many school assignments are deemed unacceptable outcomes to DC Urban Moms participants; it is common to consider opting out of the District’s school system entirely, either by going to a private school or moving out-of-district. Nearly a third of conversations on the “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” forum make reference to private educational options. For example, one parent writes, “we think we like our in-bound elementary school option, we just want to make sure those middle school years are preparing our children for a good private

high school.”<sup>49</sup> Another recommends pulling a child from public education if rejected from their top choice elementary school: “I would apply [to] Janney and pay for private if I didn’t get in.”<sup>50</sup>

Given the perceived stakes, a major component of the activity on DC Urban Moms is strategizing in order to gain access to the preferred public schools. The available tactics fall into two categories: establishing residence or playing the school lottery. Table 4 summarizes the frequency of selected housing and lottery terms, measured as the number and percentage of conversations including the term.

**Table 4: Selected Housing and Lottery Terms**

Terms	Term Frequency	
	Total	Percentage
“lottery”	5285	34.7%
“waitlist”	3550	23.3%
“preference”	1996	13.1%
“housing”	880	5.8%
“rent”	654	4.3%
Home type (e.g., “condo” or “townhouse”)	622	4.1%
“real estate”	588	3.9%
Housing Market (e.g., “buy a home” or “home value”)	454	3.0%
Home-Buying Websites (e.g., “redfin” or “zillow”)	81	0.5%

Though there is a separate forum for the discussion of renting and buying homes, over 13 percent of conversations on the “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” forum relate to housing and real estate. For instance, a participant may post their home purchase or rental budget and request recommendations about where to move. “Our budget is 500k to buy a 2-bedroom condo,” wrote one participant, before soliciting feedback on the schools in areas where they had toured homes.<sup>51</sup> Another thread titled “Where to begin in evaluating school options in DC” begins:

*We are parents of an infant and are looking to buy a home in DC in the next year or so. We think we can afford in the \$450-575k range for a 3BR/2BA... What are the basics of picking schools? Do you have any tips of good places to look in our price range?<sup>52</sup>*

Over 50 messages responded to the post, providing feedback on where to buy. But new residents are not the only ones seeking feedback on their housing plans. Some DC Urban Moms commenters discuss purchasing a new or even a second home exclusively to gain access to particular traditional public schools, typically those in Washington’s wealthiest and whitest neighborhoods.<sup>53</sup>

A much higher percentage of conversations, over 53 percent, include words related to the school lottery, including the word “lottery” but also related terms like “waitlist.” Some conversations are seeking general advice about which schools to consider adding to one’s lottery list, while others are looking for guidance on particular situations, such as having more than one child potentially applying to the same schools.<sup>54</sup> One thread suggests the commenter is a “repeat customer” of crowdsourced advice from DC Urban Moms:

*So I have to lottery for PK this year. Can you suggest to me, what schools, and in what order, I should lottery for? I don't know what is closest to me, which ones have good PK programs, etc. Would gladly take recommendations from everyone who has gone through this before! For the record, moved here two years ago and older two are in Deal—at the recommendation of this forum. I would take your advice with my eyes closed! Thank you!<sup>55</sup>*

Sometimes the conversations suggest a very deep attention to lottery outcomes. For example, there are threads in which commenters post their intended lottery lists for others to attempt to predict not only what placement they will receive, but their waitlist numbers at the schools they do not get into.<sup>56</sup>

The tactical conversations about housing and the lottery are not occurring in isolation; instead, they shape one another. Over 10 percent of conversations include a keyword related to both housing and the lottery—put differently, 79 percent of housing conversations include mention of the lottery. If a family cannot afford to be in-bound for the “right” schools, they are recommended to enter the lottery—and because they can play the lottery, DC Urban Moms participants are willing to consider living in neighborhoods where they intend to avoid the local schools.

## The Importance of Being “In-Bound”

Of all the substantive terms we counted on any topic, the single most common was “in-bound,” which appeared in nearly two-thirds of all conversations in the forum. To be “in-bound” (or “in-boundary”) for a school is to live in its catchment area, so that your children are guaranteed the right to attend; this right applies only to traditional public schools. References to “in-bound” outpaced many very common words, including references to “DCPS,” the acronym for the traditional public school system, as well as “charter” and “parent.” Other references to boundaries, such as being “out-of-bounds,” also feature in more than a fifth of all conversations.

The importance of being in-bound is often linked by DC Urban Mom participants to the school’s feeder pattern. Students graduating from each traditional public elementary school are guaranteed a spot in specific middle and high schools; if one attends, for instance, Raymond Elementary School, one can attend McFarland Middle School and Theodore Roosevelt High School. Almost a fourth of all conversations on the forum refer to feeder patterns.

**Table 5: Frequency of Terms for Boundaries and Feeder Patterns**

Terms	Term Frequency	
	Total	Percentage
"in-bound"	9690	63.7%
"feed"	3596	23.6%
"out-of-bounds"	3338	21.9%
"zoned"	792	5.2%

Because different neighborhoods and elementary schools set a track for a child's public education access, DC Urban Mom commenters are sometimes planning as much as a decade ahead of their child's actual school attendance. For instance, when a parent of a four-year-old sought advice on home buying given their preschool options, the first response was, "If you are thinking of moving, I'd move somewhere with a stronger school and a path for middl[e]/high school." Other comments followed in the same vein: "Homes that are comfortably big enough for a family of 4 near Garrison start at \$1.3. You can get something in-bounds for Deal for much less than that (but still not cheap) near chevy chase circle or in other parts of upper, upper northwest."<sup>57</sup>

As this last comment would imply, much of the discussion around boundaries and feeder patterns is specifically about getting into Alice Deal Middle School and Woodrow Wilson High School, the two most commonly discussed schools on DC Urban Moms. While 16 percent of all conversations mention Wilson, 37 percent of conversations discussing feeder patterns refer to Wilson. Similarly, 23 percent of all conversations refer to Deal, but more than half of all conversations mentioning feeder patterns refer to Deal.

The forum's focus on the Wilson feeder pattern mirrors actual enrollment patterns in the District. According to one recent study of District parents' decisions to attend their in-bound traditional elementary school:

*Location within the feeder pattern for Wilson High School, D.C.'s top-performing in-boundary high school, outweighs all other neighborhood aspects in explaining the tendency to enroll at in-boundary schools.<sup>58</sup>*

Other feeder patterns are commonly raised as an issue with elementary schools, even if the school itself is seen as good. "I have a soon to be kindergartner and we're in bounds for Brent. I like Brent for Elementary school but don't like the middle school options. What schools do kids go to after Brent if they don't stay in DCPS?" asks one DC Urban Moms commenter. "Half a dozen of my kids' 3rd grade classmates, children from his ECE [early childhood education] cohort at Brent, will invariably land in Deal feeders for 4th or 5th, no matter what's happening," responds another.<sup>59</sup>

There is substantial discussion of the enforcement and maintenance of existing school boundaries. A common trope is to report seeing kids arrive at a school from a car with Maryland license plates, implying that the parents are not District residents and therefore ineligible to send their children to District schools. “I’m pretty cranky when I see MD plates doing drop off at the HRCS we got shut out of,”<sup>60</sup> one commenter grouses, using an acronym for “highly regarded charter schools.”<sup>61</sup>

The forum also features strong reactions to potential changes to boundaries and feeder patterns. These conversations tend to discuss both residents’ access to schools and the potential implications for housing values. In a message from 2012, the poster expresses *schadenfreude* at the possibility that residents of Duddington Place, on Capitol Hill, might have their street rezoned from Woodrow Wilson High School to Eastern Senior High School:

*If someone on Duddington complains that switching to Eastern is going to hurt their property value, quelle dommage, baby! There is a 2 bedroom, 1 bath for sale right now on Duddington for \$650k. No parking, 70s kitchen.*<sup>62</sup>

Using a French idiom meaning “what a pity,” the commenter suggests that because housing prices on the street are very high, he or she feels no sympathy for complaints about rezoning.

A few years later, a more systematic rezoning plan provoked much more backlash on the message board. When citywide boundaries and feeder patterns were under official reconsideration in 2014–2015, the Crestwood neighborhood was slated to be moved out of the Deal Middle School feeder pattern.<sup>63</sup> The issue was a hot topic: “We bought in Crestwood with the expectation that deal would be available to us,” one commenter complained.<sup>64</sup> In total, there were twelve times as many conversations that referred to Crestwood in 2014, compared to previous years.

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No matter their attitude to particular mechanisms of advantage, forum participants recognize real estate as a tool for achieving their preferred school assignments.

No matter their attitude to particular mechanisms of advantage, forum participants recognize real estate as a tool for achieving their preferred school assignments. But they also use a second and related mechanism, the school lottery. Lottery strategies provoke immense fervor on the forum.

## Lottery

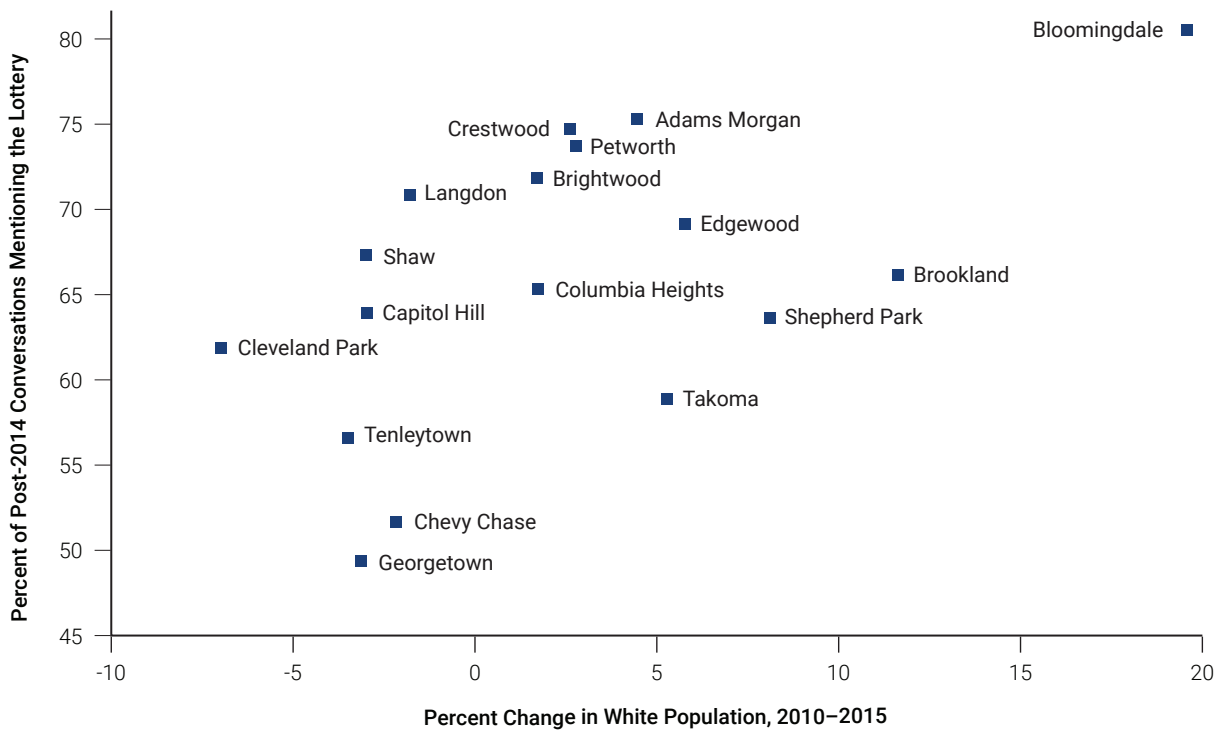
My School DC, a district-wide public school lottery instituted in Washington, D.C., in 2014, replaced a system of individual school lotteries that was widely agreed to be extraordinarily difficult for parents to navigate. Parents now apply with their ordered list of up to 12 preferred schools prior to the citywide deadlines in February (for high school) and March (for earlier grades). In recent years, the system has processed about 25,000 applications a year.<sup>65</sup>



The effect of the new lottery system is visible in a sharp change in activity patterns on the forum. Though the busiest time of year on the forum has always been spring, when parents are choosing schools for the fall, the percentage of new posts that occur in January and February jumped 36 percent in the years after the lottery was instituted. Overall, about one-third of all conversations on the forum refer to the school lottery, and more than a fifth refer to waitlists (Table 5). The frequency of references to the lottery increases somewhat after 2014, rising from 30 percent in previous years to 37 percent thereafter.

While the lottery is, to some degree, an alternative to residential access to schools, it also influences the housing strategies discussed on the forum. There is a strong geographic pattern to the frequency with which the school lottery is mentioned; DC Urban Moms participants are more likely to refer to the lottery if they are also talking about gentrifying neighborhoods. Figure 7 plots this relationship.<sup>66</sup>

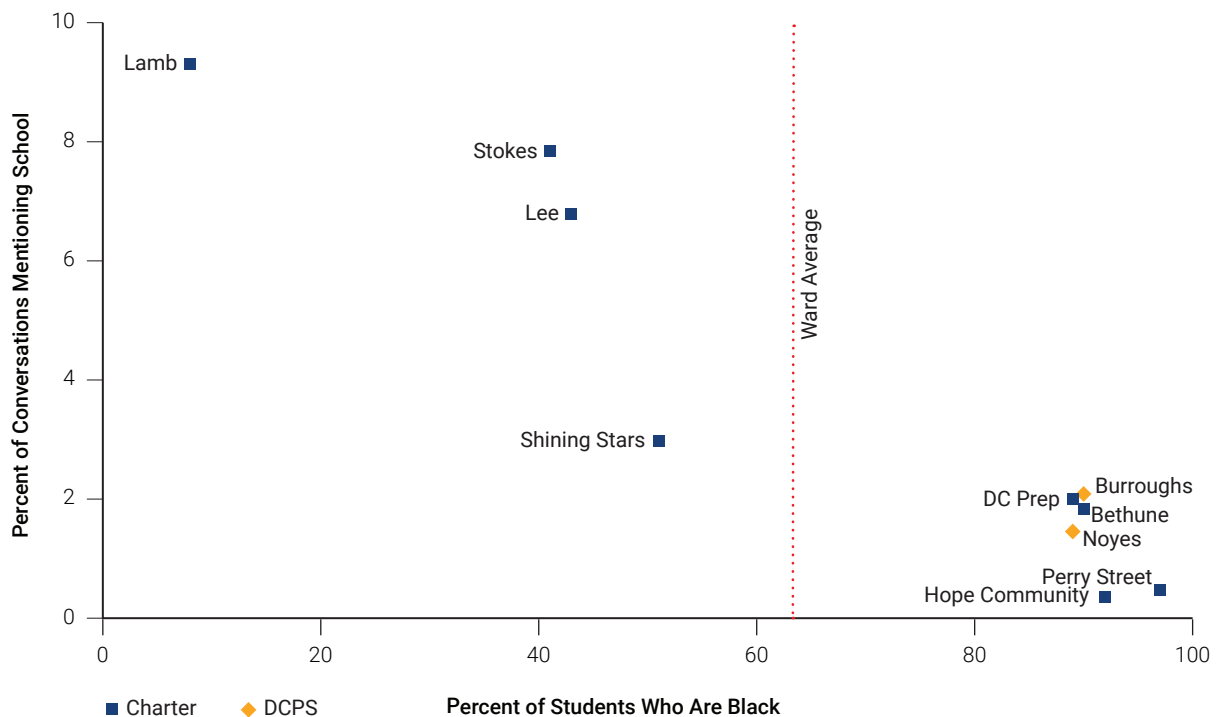
**Figure 7: Neighborhood Conversations and the Lottery**



A closer look at the Brookland neighborhood shows how interest in the lottery plays out in practice. In Ward 5, where Brookland is located, the percent of children under five who are white rose from nine percent to 21 percent in the last ten years, substantially altering the demography of incoming students in the neighborhood.<sup>67</sup> As research in other school districts would predict,<sup>68</sup> white students in this gentrifying neighborhood have mostly self-segregated into a handful of charter schools; the remaining schools serve almost exclusively Black student populations.

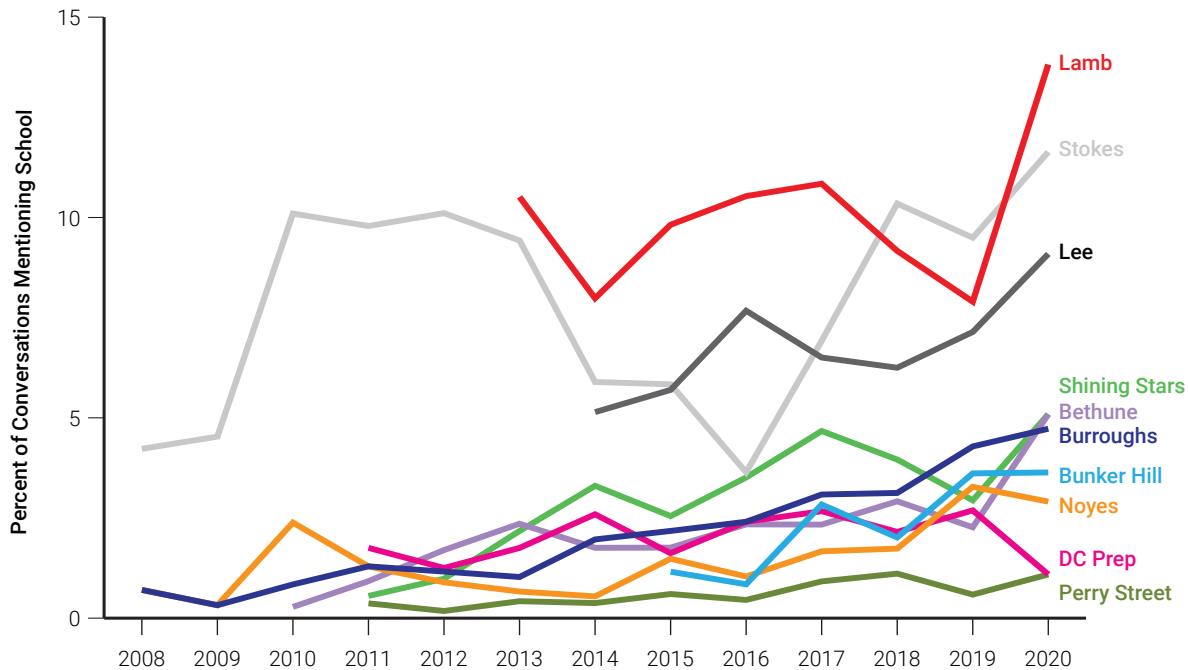
The conversations about Brookland schools on DC Urban Moms illustrate one mechanism by which this self-segregation occurs. Nearly three thousand forum conversations, almost one-fifth of the total, mention at least one Brookland elementary school, and total attention to these schools has grown over time. But DC Urban Moms participants focus heavily on a few schools in the neighborhood. On average, elementary schools in Brookland that are less than 50 percent Black are mentioned more than four times as often per year as schools that are more than 50 percent Black. Figure 8 plots this correlation.

**Figure 8: School Racial Demography and Attention on DC Urban Moms**



Because we are looking within a single neighborhood, the differential in attention we see here is not a simple result of the geographic segregation of Washington, D.C. Instead, we can see that even when schools are geographically proximate, it is schools with a larger percentage of white students that receive attention on the DC Urban Moms forum.

Given the changing demography of the neighborhood and opening of new schools over the period, it is worthwhile to examine how attention to Brookland schools has varied. Figure 9 traces attention to Brookland schools over time.

**Figure 9: Attention to Brookland Schools Over Time**

Two high-attention schools opened in Brookland during the time period: Lee Montessori and the Brookland campus of Latin American Montessori Bilingual. These schools join Elsie Whitlow Stokes among the schools much-discussed on the forum. Other options have seen either slow growth in attention or have not seen a substantial increase in attention over time. In other words, parents looking to DC Urban Moms for information about schools in Brookland have consistently heard far more about some schools than others, and the schools they hear about are the schools with substantial white populations.

A deeper examination of the data, moreover, suggests that the lesser-mentioned schools are spoken of differently than the highest-attention schools. As noted in the cluster analysis previously (Figures 2 and 4), the commonly-mentioned charter schools in Wards 1, 4, and 5 tend to be associated with superlative terms, while the cluster of commonly-mentioned traditional public schools in this area is associated with more moderate praise.

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A typical example is the 2020 thread entitled “Northeast and Capitol Hill Schools,” in which a DC Urban Moms commenter was concerned about the school options near a two-to-three bedroom home with “rent between \$2500–3000.” A respondent counselled that she should consider moving to Brookland and play the school lottery until a preferable local school is attained:

*In Brookland there are enough schools that you’ll get something eventually, and you’ll be fine at Langley or Bunker Hill or Burroughs until you do.<sup>69</sup>*

Bunker Hill and [John] Burroughs are two of the traditional public elementary schools in the neighborhood that feed into Brookland Middle School, which residents have the right to attend if they live within their catchment area; Langley Elementary is a traditional public school in neighboring Eckington. Here they are presented as a stopgap measure until repeated lottery efforts secure access to a more desirable option.

There are undoubtedly many differences between the elementary schools of Brookland and many reasons for choosing one or another. But there is certainly not a one-to-one correlation between quantitative measures of student achievement and school attention on DC Urban Moms. Burroughs, for example, has Math and English proficiency scores similar to Lee Montessori, but Lee is mentioned three times as often.<sup>70</sup> In the following section, we examine more closely the role of test scores in DC Urban Moms conversations.

## How Do DC Urban Moms Participants Talk about Test Scores?

Forum participants use the forum to evaluate, compare, and often explicitly rank the education options available to them. For example, in at least two percent of all conversation threads, the subject line of a “DC Public and Public Charter Schools” post is an explicit comparison: “Murch vs. Janney”<sup>71</sup>, “Moving to Woodley—Oyster v. Eaton”<sup>72</sup>, or “Two Rivers or Inspired Teaching for Middle School?”<sup>73</sup> But these conversations are not typical of the conversation on the site as a whole; they are heavily weighted to the schools that are frequently discussed on the forum, and those schools are discussed differently from other schools.

How, then, do forum participants respond to the criteria that are available for nearly all schools? Almost every public school in the District does share at least one potential metric for comparison: test scores and ratings. In Washington D.C., students take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) every year starting in 3rd grade. The results of this standardized test also make up a central component of the STAR Framework rating system that the District began applying to public schools in 2018.<sup>74</sup>

This is not to suggest that test scores are necessarily a *good* metric for school comparison.<sup>75</sup> Children are tested in only a few subjects, and high stakes testing can encourage “teaching to the test” rather than well-rounded education.<sup>76</sup> Measures of student proficiency (as opposed to growth<sup>77</sup>) are also strongly correlated with the socioeconomic status of the students, and so provide little information about the impact of the school on student learning. A striking finding of one recent study was that college entrance exam scores were measurably worse for low income students if the test were taken in the last two weeks of a SNAP benefit cycle, when poor families’ food supplies tend to run low.<sup>78</sup> Under such circumstances, low test scores do indicate failure—not of teachers or of students, but rather a societal failure to ensure the basic health and wellbeing of children.

Nonetheless, test scores seem at first glance to be an important consideration in DC Urban Moms conversations. Test scores are a common topic; 22 percent of all threads in our dataset mention test scores, PARCC, or standardized tests. That number increases substantially in threads that are discussing specific schools. Among the 76 most commonly discussed schools, at least 30 percent of threads referring to each school also mentioned test scores.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, as Table 3 would suggest, schools with better test scores receive more attention on DC Urban Moms, and a school’s low scores are commonly cited as a reason to avoid attending.

But test scores may serve more as a shorthand or euphemism, rather than an empirical measure of school quality. For instance, comments referring to test scores are not typically described as evidence of teaching ability at the school, but rather as an indicator that the students at that school would make undesirable peers.

Commenters are sometimes quite explicit about “getting away from low scoring students.”<sup>80</sup>

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So, do test scores “matter” on DC Urban Moms? The best evidence for the impact of test scores on school reputation would be if new data releases changed attention to schools. Because a new system of school ratings was released during the time period of our dataset, we can explore this possibility.

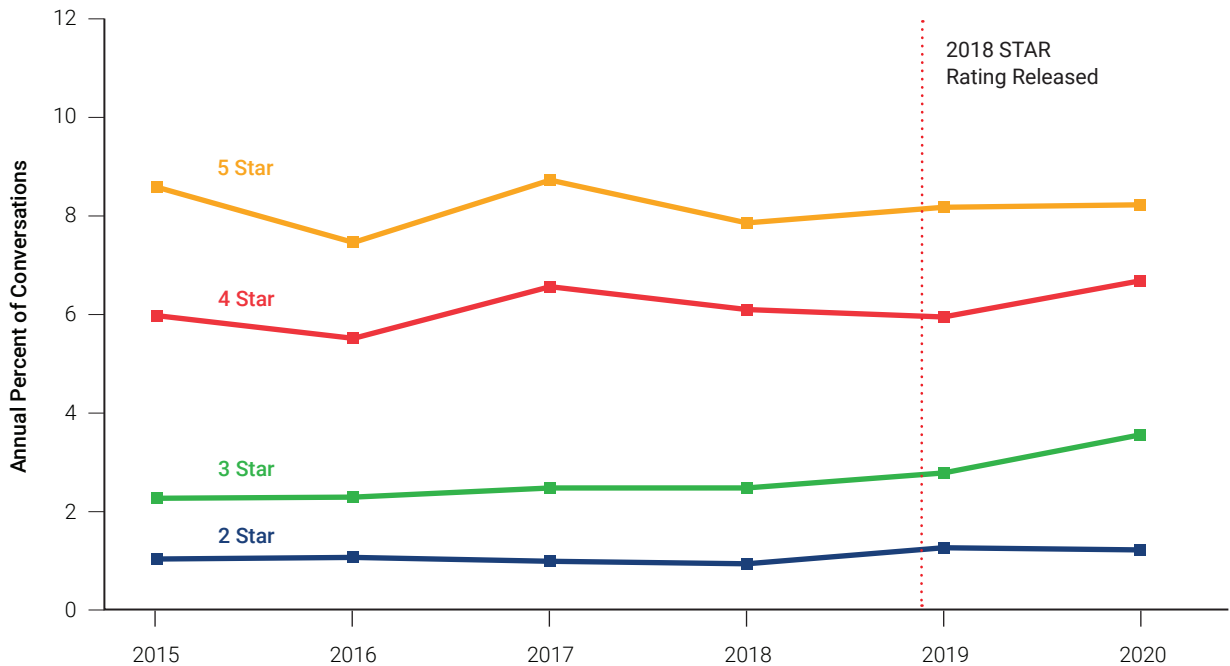
## Seeing Stars

In 2018, the District of Columbia released a new “report card” for its traditional and charter public schools. The “School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework” weighted various school metrics, but primarily standardized test scores, to produce an overall rating for each school, ranging from one to five stars. The Framework also reported performance data for subgroups within a school, including at-risk students and students with disabilities. While the algorithm used to produce the ratings was hotly contested,<sup>81</sup> the STAR Framework provided District parents with what appeared on the surface to be a simple, quantitative ranking of school quality. How was this new information incorporated into conversations on DC Urban Moms?

Prior to its release, conversations about the STAR Framework included concerns about the heavy reliance on standardized tests, speculation about how particular schools would perform, and appreciation for “an easy apples to apples comparison tool.”<sup>82</sup> The release of the report engendered threads with hundreds of messages responding to the data.<sup>83</sup> In the following weeks and months, DC Urban Moms commenters referred to schools according to their star ratings. Figure 10 shows the increase in phrases like “two-star” or “five-star” after the initial release of the rating system (denoted by a red dotted line).



**Figure 11: Attention to District Schools Before and After the 2018 STAR Rating**



The case of the STAR Framework does not bode well for the power of elected officials to substantially change school reputation through the general release of official information based primarily on test scores.<sup>88</sup> Though DC Urban Moms participants regularly refer to test scores, and often introduce official information from government websites to their conversations (see Appendix A), a prominent case of the District providing a new rubric for school quality did little to alter the attention schools receive.

The interpretation of these results is not necessarily that DC Urban Moms participants dismissed the ratings. It could simply be that the STAR ratings were not, by and large, surprising; if the STAR ratings matched the schools' previous reputation, we would not expect the release to result in change. Alternatively, it may be that, as in other contexts, informal commentary simply outweighs official government data.<sup>89</sup> In any case, while STAR ratings were certainly incorporated into the conversations on DC Urban Moms, the release of the STAR rating system does not appear to have resulted in any great shifts in school attention on DC Urban Moms.



## Discussion

It is important to be clear about the limitations of the data presented here. First, we cannot draw conclusions about what factors actually motivate school choice decision making by DC Urban Moms participants. In other words, we can only examine the participants' *rationales*, their stated reasons, not the motivations they are unwilling to reveal in writing (or, for that matter, the motivations they are themselves unaware of). We also cannot match respondents' assertions and considerations to their actual decisionmaking in the real world.

Second, the results presented here are only descriptive in nature; causal claims are beyond the scope of the data. We cannot say whether the advice and recommendations made by participants significantly affect the actual school choices of other participants. An interesting line of future research would be to test whether other interventions, such as different information from official sources, or organized voluntary engagement with the forum, would change the tenor or substance of DC Urban Moms conversations, or the decisionmaking of its participants.

Third, we cannot verify the identities of DC Urban Moms participants. In a number of ways, we saw that conversations on DC Urban Moms mirrored real-world activity, including preferred feeder patterns and lottery waitlists. But an online forum is only one window into parental attitudes. It should not be taken to represent the views of all parents in the District, or for that matter, all upper-middle-class white parents in the District.

Finally, and most significantly, the data here cannot and do not address how and whether schools are serving the children in them. In reading conversations on the DC Urban Moms forum, there is a striking thinness in the description for all but a select few schools. Over-attention to the attitudes expressed in the DC Urban Moms forum risks reinforcing the stereotypes and blind spots that are endemic to the discussions on the forum. A fascinating line for future research would be to explore the discussion of public schooling that occurs in online forums and informal networks utilized by minority and working-class parents; the attitudes and assumptions in these contexts would plausibly be very different.

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Over-attention to the attitudes expressed in the DC Urban Moms forum risks reinforcing the stereotypes and blind spots that are endemic to the discussions on the forum.

Similarly, the policy levers discussed here—residential school access and the lottery—should not be assessed exclusively in terms of how they are used by comparatively privileged parents. The contribution of this analysis should not be to encourage policymakers to put greater weight on the perspectives of DC Urban Moms’ participants. Rather, the conversations that occur on DC Urban Moms are useful in that they trace how facially neutral policies can be used to concentrate privilege. The real test of public policy, in education and more broadly, is whether it works for the disadvantaged; the dynamics we see in the DC Urban Moms conversations are worth understanding because systems that promote resource hoarding undermine the goal of public education.

Given the importance of informal school reputations in parents’ school-choice decisions, the conversations on DC Urban Moms are useful illustrations of how schools are assessed in one community, one that is prominent in local discussions of schools and education politics.<sup>90</sup> It joins a growing literature that identifies evidence of systematic biases in online forums that mirror significant patterns in real-world behavior.<sup>91</sup>

The title of this paper, “We all want what’s best for our kids,” is a quote from one DC Urban Moms participant and also a common trope of parenting.<sup>92</sup> The conversations on the forum allow us to explore how members of this community think about what is “best,” and what steps they take to acquire that “best” for their children.

The results suggest that if there is a market for schools in the District, the commenters on DC Urban Moms are participating in a highly segregated version of it. On the forum, schools are discussed in clusters defined by geography and grade but also by the racial makeup of the student body. To a striking extent, student demography appears to shape how and even whether individual schools receive attention.

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Even within a gentrifying neighborhood, and even when other local schools have similar test scores, the schools with more white students receive much more attention.

A large percentage of schools in the District are almost never discussed on the forum, and those rarely-mentioned schools have higher rates of poverty and serve students that are almost exclusively Black. The inattention to these schools can be explained only in part by the city’s neighborhood segregation. Even within a gentrifying neighborhood, and even when other local schools have similar test scores, the schools with more white students receive much more attention.

There are good reasons to believe that this attention matters. Research in political science suggests that, even absent reputational implications, simple name recognition can change voting behavior.<sup>93</sup> When people are considering their options, familiarity is an encouraging feature.

Moreover, clusters of schools are discussed in very different terms. The wealthiest and whitest clusters of schools not only have more thorough consideration of their academic and extracurricular offerings, but conversations about these schools are also more likely to refer, rather than to demographic categories, to

the people that make up the schools, using words like “moms,” “children,” “families,” and “teachers.” The individuals attending lesser-attention schools are thus *doubly* invisible to the DC Urban Moms participants.

When it comes to quantitative data about schooling, we find a somewhat paradoxical result. On the one hand, test scores are commonly mentioned by DC Urban Moms participants. On the other hand, the release of a new school ranking system does not appear to have had an aggregate effect on the attention schools receive on the forum. It is possible that these data, weighted as they were toward student proficiency rather than growth, simply reinforced the forum participants’ existing perceptions of schools. Indeed, given the correlations between test scores and student demography, some comments about “low-scoring students” are plausibly best understood as dog whistles.

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The two mechanisms of school access, residence and the lottery... give well-off parents repeated opportunities to self-segregate.

Finally, much of the discussion on the forum focuses on how to gain access to the relatively narrow band of preferred schools. Discussions of the two mechanisms of school access, residence and the lottery, reveal that these are not competing strategies, but used in tandem in ways that give well-off parents repeated opportunities to self-segregate. Because housing choices are school choices, housing policy is education policy, and education policy feeds back into housing markets. The results illustrate two interconnected instances of the failure of market-based solutions to provide equitable, essential public goods.

## Conclusion

The conversations on DC Urban Moms illustrate what other research has also shown: When privileged parents choose, they tend to choose segregation. Taken together, the patterns of conversation on DC Urban Moms illustrate three mechanisms of segregation: First, the differential visibility of schools themselves, leaving many schools wholly unconsidered by those who use the forum to assess their school options; second, the provision of unequal information about schools and about their students; and finally, active discussion of strategies for school access that in the aggregate maintain structural inequalities in housing and education in the District. Conversations among privileged parents can both recapitulate and, to the extent they are influential, reinforce racial segregation in the District's schools.

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The conversations on DC Urban Moms illustrate what other research has also shown: When privileged parents choose, they tend to choose segregation.

Though school diversity is no panacea for the societal ills that stem from centuries of systemic racism and economic exploitation,<sup>94</sup> the findings present a challenge for opponents of school segregation—and its attendant resource hoarding—and for the hope of a more equal and integrated society.

## Appendix A: Outside Sources and DC Urban Moms

DC Urban Moms participants regularly introduce URL links to their comments, providing a useful window into the sources of outside information commonly cited by participants on the forum. Links were shared by DC Urban Moms users in 4,724 unique topics or 31 percent of all conversations. Almost one-third of conversations include a URL, and a handful of sources predominate; 15 websites account for over half of the total links shared. Government websites are the most prevalent, along with local news sources and links to social media.

Website	Unique Links	Source Type
<a href="https://dc.gov">dc.gov</a>	1,579	Government
<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com">washingtonpost.com</a>	859	News
<a href="https://dcpcsb.org">dcpcsb.org</a>	496	Government
<a href="https://dcurbanmom.com">dcurbanmom.com</a>	284	Social Media
<a href="https://myschooldc.org">myschooldc.org</a>	200	Government
<a href="https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com">washingtoncitypaper.com</a>	131	News
<a href="https://www.google.com">google.com</a>	120	Other
<a href="https://public.tableau.com">public.tableau.com</a> <sup>95</sup>	115	Government
<a href="https://dcpubliccharter.com">dcpubliccharter.com</a>	104	Government
<a href="https://www.nytimes.com">nytimes.com</a>	97	News
<a href="https://twitter.com">twitter.com</a>	84	Social Media
<a href="https://www.wikipedia.org">wikipedia.org</a>	76	Other
<a href="https://greatschools.org">greatschools.org</a>	74	Other
<a href="https://www.wamu.org">wamu.org</a>	72	News
<a href="https://www.youtube.com">youtube.com</a>	60	Social Media

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**Hao Sun** was a Senior Research Analyst at the Brookings Institution in the Center for Technology Innovation. He is now an Assistant Professor in the Department of Government and Public Affairs at Gallaudet University.

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- 25 More than 99 percent of all comments have “Anonymous” as their username (as in Figure 1); the remaining comments have user-selected usernames (such as “teachermom” or “zozobra78”).
- 26 Before beginning this research, we contacted the site regarding our intention of scraping the forums and received approval to do so from the site’s co-owner on September 8, 2017. The webscrape was conducted by Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie, Fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, and Hao Sun, who was a Senior Research Analyst at the Brookings Institution in the Center for Technology Innovation and is now an Assistant Professor in the Department of Government and Public Affairs at Gallaudet University.
- 27 The spike is likely due to the fact that the District of Columbia government was reconsidering school boundaries, feeder patterns, and the lottery system during this period.
- 28 Not all schools are equally easy to identify through text analysis. For instance, schools that share their name or nickname with neighborhoods, famous figures, or common nouns risk unintentional over-counting. Other schools have names that are harder to spell or are more subject to typos, and therefore might be prone to undercounting. We conducted multiple tests for accuracy on every school in the dataset and believe that no systemic miscount—either overcount or undercount—risks the robustness of the results presented here.
- 29 Schools in the District sometimes open, close, merge, or change their names. For some of the most recently opened schools, data is not yet available. Our dataset includes all District of Columbia public schools for children participating in the school lottery in the 2017–2018 school year.
- 30 Where appropriate, we look for keyword stems, rather than whole words, and we group variations of the same word together. For instance, “HS” and “high school” are counted together, and we count “in-bounds” and “in-boundaries” as well as the abbreviation “IB” together as a part of “in-bound.” At the message level, there are duplications in the corpus that would lead to an overcount; when a participant responds to an earlier comment, the text of the earlier comment often precedes their response. Throughout the report, the term “frequency” refers to the number of conversations that include at least one reference to the term, an approach that resolves the issue of message-level duplication.

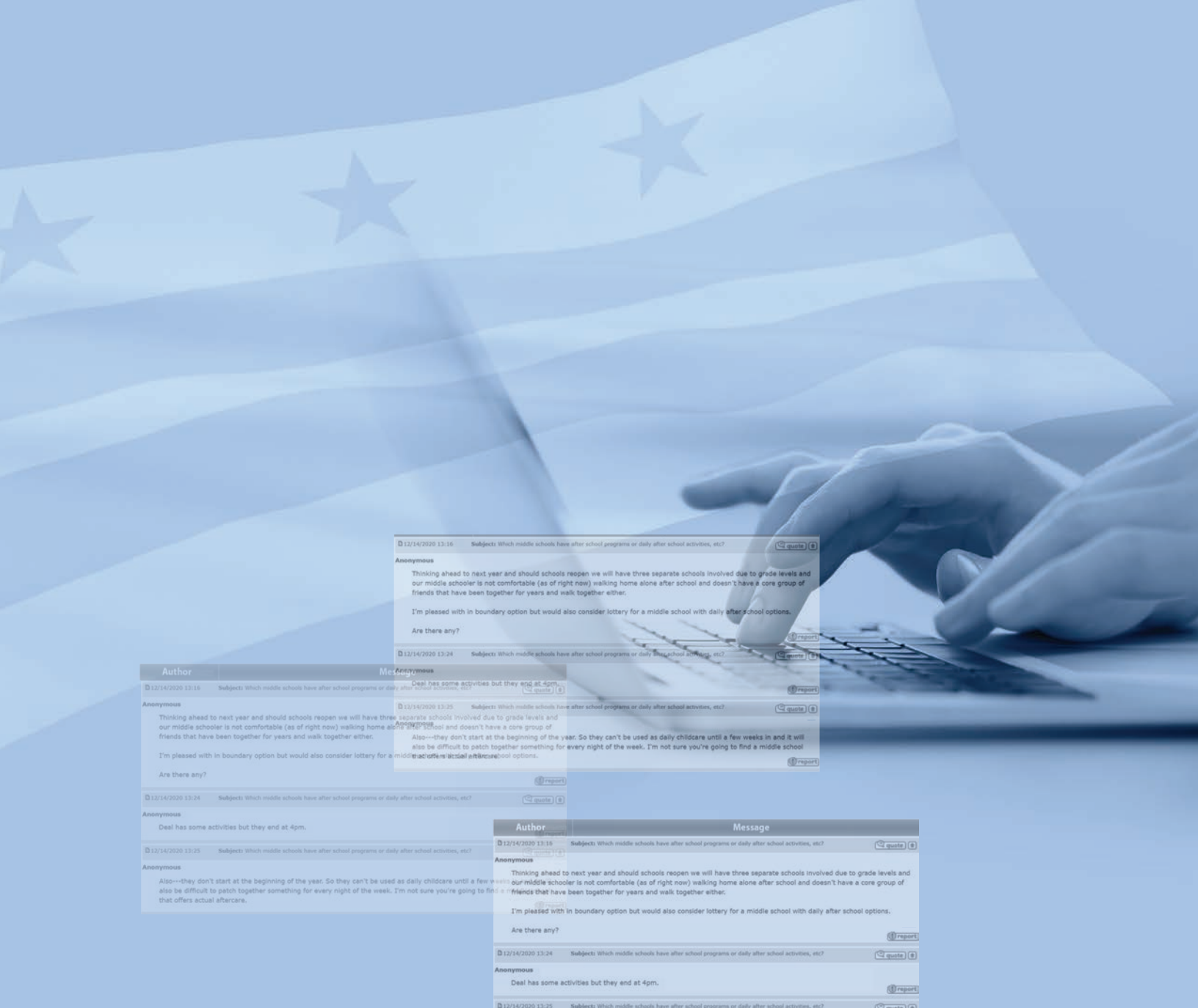
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- 37 In fact, many of the schools in this cluster are so commonly discussed together that participants use an acronym to describe them: “JKLMM” or “Janney, Key, Lafayette, Mann and Murch.”
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- 39 For example, see: “SY19–20 Enrollment Data” *DC Urban Moms and Dads*, 27 April 2020, <https://www.dcurbanmom.com/jforum/posts/list/15/876211.page#1704855317048386>. Accessed 5 Mar. 2021.
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- 41 The difference in waitlist length persists when comparing the length of waitlists relative to the size of the school, rather than simply a total count.

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- 43 However, the Appletree network of twelve charter schools has four campuses east of the river, and is among the most frequently mentioned schools.
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12/14/2020 13:16 Subjects: Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?

Anonymous

Thinking ahead to next year and should schools reopen we will have three separate schools involved due to grade levels and our middle schooler is not comfortable (as of right now) walking home alone after school and doesn't have a core group of friends that have been together for years and walk together either.

I'm pleased with in boundary option but would also consider lottery for a middle school with daily after school options.

Are there any?

12/14/2020 13:24 Subjects: Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?

Anonymous

Deal has some activities but they end at 4pm.

12/14/2020 13:25 Subjects: Which middle schools have after school programs or daily after school activities, etc?

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Also---they don't start at the beginning of the year. So they can't be used as daily childcare until a few weeks in and it will also be difficult to patch together something for every night of the week. I'm not sure you're going to find a middle school that offers actual aftercare.

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