Priority for at-risk students in D.C.’s common lottery: Potential implications for access and diversity

July 21st, 2020
Why is a priority for at-risk students important to consider in D.C.?

- A large proportion (45%) of D.C.’s students are considered to be at-risk for funding purposes.

- Socioeconomic diversity is low at 35 schools with less than 20% of students who are at-risk.

- Access to some highly-rated schools can be a challenge for at-risk students due to location, sibling preference, and high waitlists.


Note: Adult and Alternative schools have been excluded. Seven closed schools that did not have data for school year 2018-19 have also been excluded.

D.C. Policy Center | dcpolicycenter.org
Analysis: Three scenarios of implementing this priority for a D.C. public charter school, compared to the status quo

1. At-risk preference before other preferences (sibling and children of staff)
2. At-risk preference after other preferences
3. Reserving a percentage of seats for at-risk students

How would this priority change outcomes around access and diversity for the entry grade of prekindergarten?
Applicant pool for Balance PCS

- 48 applicants are at-risk
- 15 siblings, including 2 who are at-risk
- 1 child of staff
- 311 other (no preference)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Balance PCS</th>
<th>D.C. average</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students who are at-risk</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitlist for PK3</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of PK3 seats offered</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
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An at-risk priority has the potential to increase socioeconomic diversity at schools that serve low percentages of at-risk students.
Findings: Composition of incoming PK3 class

Compared to a school that is 15% at-risk, the incoming PK3 class would have the following compositions:

**Under the status quo:**
- 11% at-risk

**In each scenario:**
- 100% at-risk with at-risk preference *first*
- 61% at-risk with at-risk preference *last*
- 31% at-risk with reserving 30% of seats
An at-risk preference improves the match rate for individual at-risk students.
Findings: Match rate

Estimated match rate under the status quo:
- 4% for at-risk applicants
- 10% for all applicants

Estimated match rate for at-risk applicants in each scenario:
- 71% for at-risk applicants with at-risk preference *first*
- 42% for at-risk applicants with at-risk preference *last*
- 19% for at-risk applicants with reserving seats

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis.
D.C. Policy Center | dcpolicycenter.org
Findings: over time

Percent of students in all grades at PK-5 school who are at-risk over time, by scenario

Year of preference implementation

Percent at-risk of school

Year 1: 15%
Year 2: 17%
Year 3: 21%
Year 4: 26%
Year 5: 31%
Year 6: 61%
Year 7: 100%
Year 8: 100%

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis.
D.C. Policy Center I dcpolicycenter.org

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What is the potential impact of an at-risk priority?

- An at-risk priority could change the socioeconomic composition of students in entry grades immediately at particular schools.
- It increases match rates for individual at-risk applicants.
- Over time, it could shift the demographics of the entire school implementing the priority.
Other considerations

**Systemwide effects**

- Systemwide, this priority for at-risk applicants could have ripple effects at other schools.
- Potential increased applications from at-risk students due to increased marketing or interest
- Less change in composition of incoming class if at-risk applicants are applying to the same set of schools

**Other school types**

- Schools with more than 50% at-risk would see a smaller impact because they are currently less likely to have a waitlist
- Need more data to evaluate the interaction with in-boundary preference for DCPS
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