Priority for at-risk students in D.C.'s common lottery: Potential implications for access and diversity
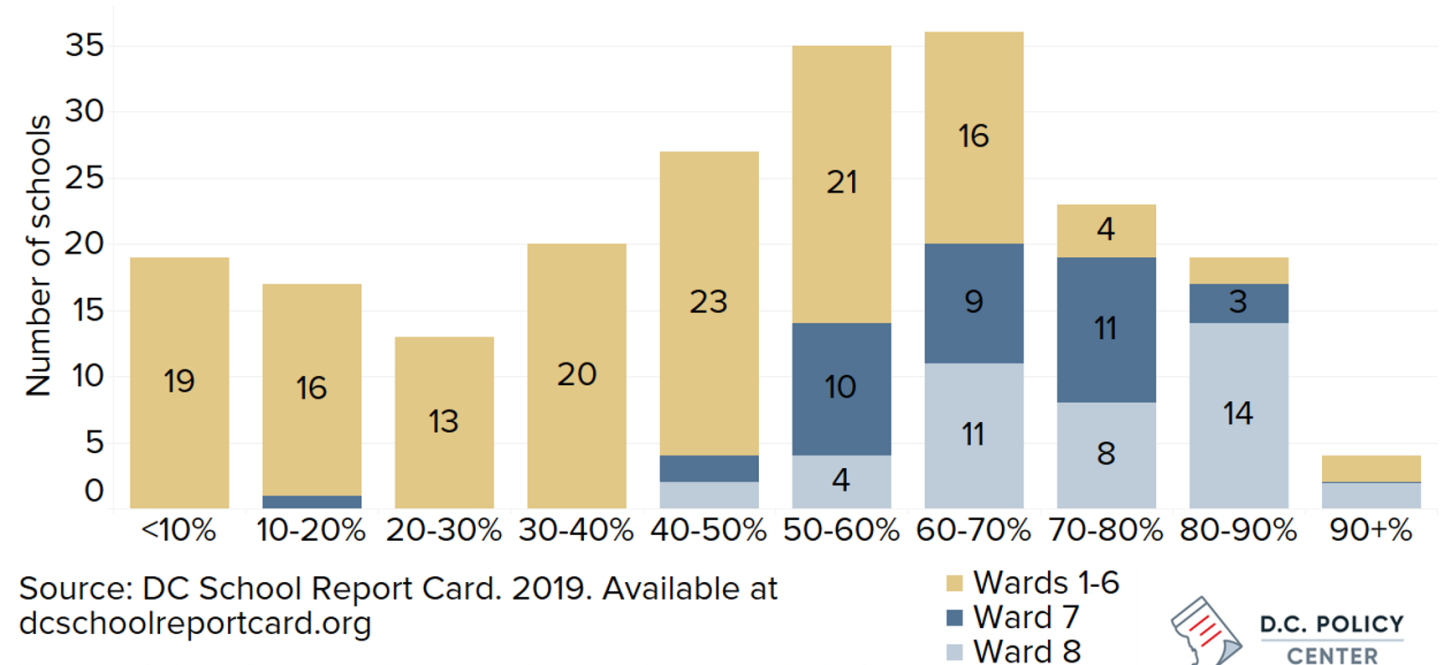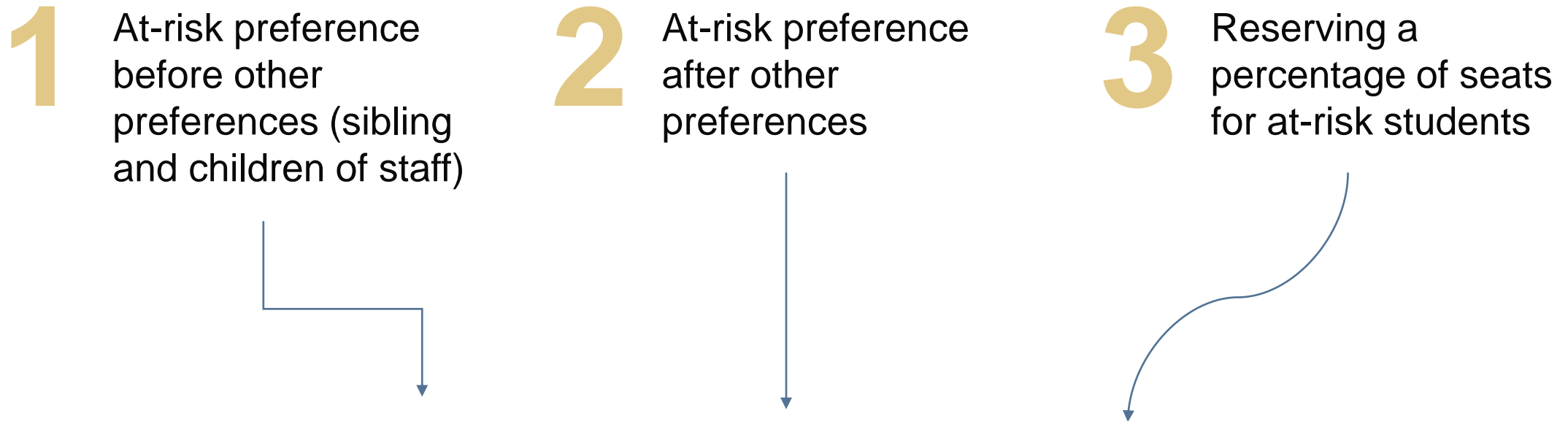
July 21st, 2020

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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

Percentage of at-risk students at each school

Source: DC School Report Card. 2019. Available at dcschoolreportcard.org

Wards 1-6
Ward 7
Ward 8

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.

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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?

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Model school: Created a profile for Balance PCS, composite of data from schools most likely to see largest impact

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)

Characteristic	Balance PCS	D.C. average
Percentage of students who are at-risk	15%	45%
Waitlist for PK3	287	70
Number of PK3 seats offered	36	43

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Status quo with no priority for at-risk applicants:
11% of pre-kindergarten students are at-risk

At-risk preference *before* siblings:
100% of pre-kindergarten students are at-risk

At-risk preference *after* siblings:
61% of pre-kindergarten students are at-risk

Reserve 30% of seats for at-risk students:
31% of pre-kindergarten students are at-risk

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

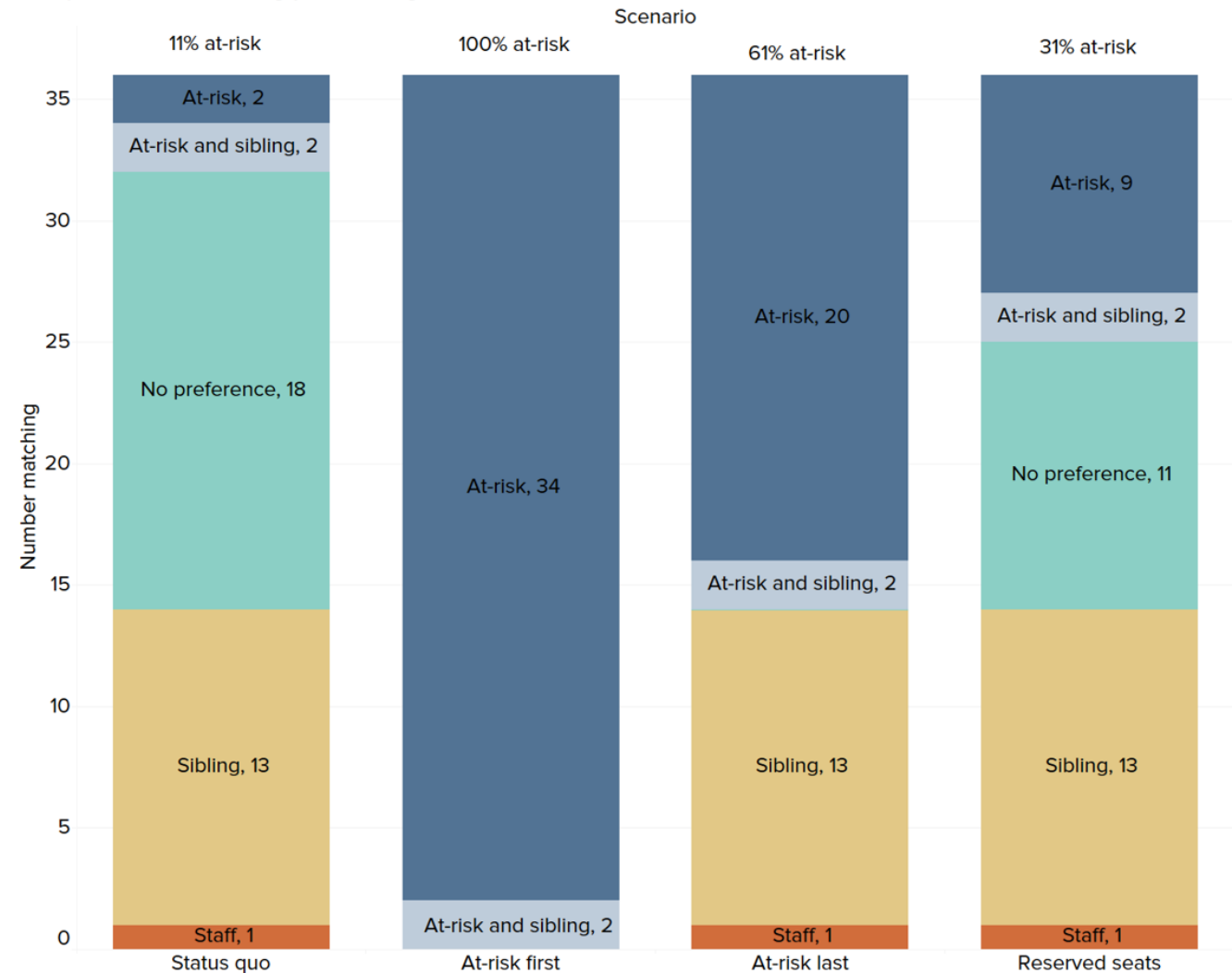Compared to a school that is 15% at-risk, the incoming PK3 class would have the following compositions:

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*
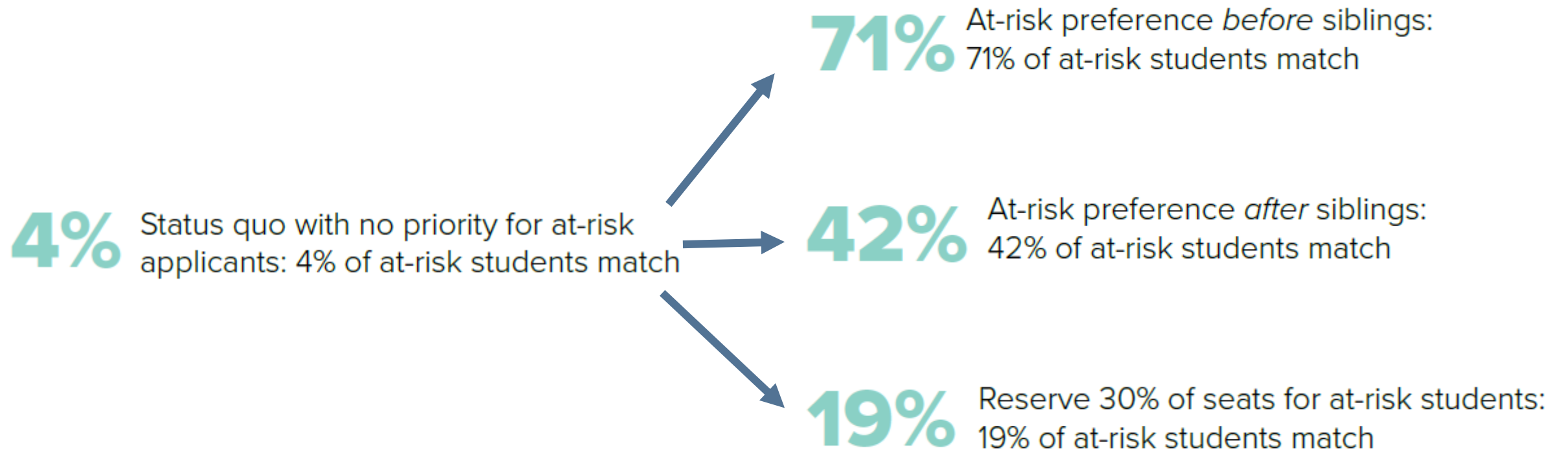- 31% at-risk with reserving 30% of seats

Composition of incoming pre-kindergarten 3 class

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis.
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71% At-risk preference *before* siblings: 71% of at-risk students match

4% Status quo with no priority for at-risk applicants: 4% of at-risk students match

42% At-risk preference *after* siblings: 42% of at-risk students match

19% Reserve 30% of seats for at-risk students: 19% of at-risk students match

An at-risk preference improves the match rate for individual at-risk students
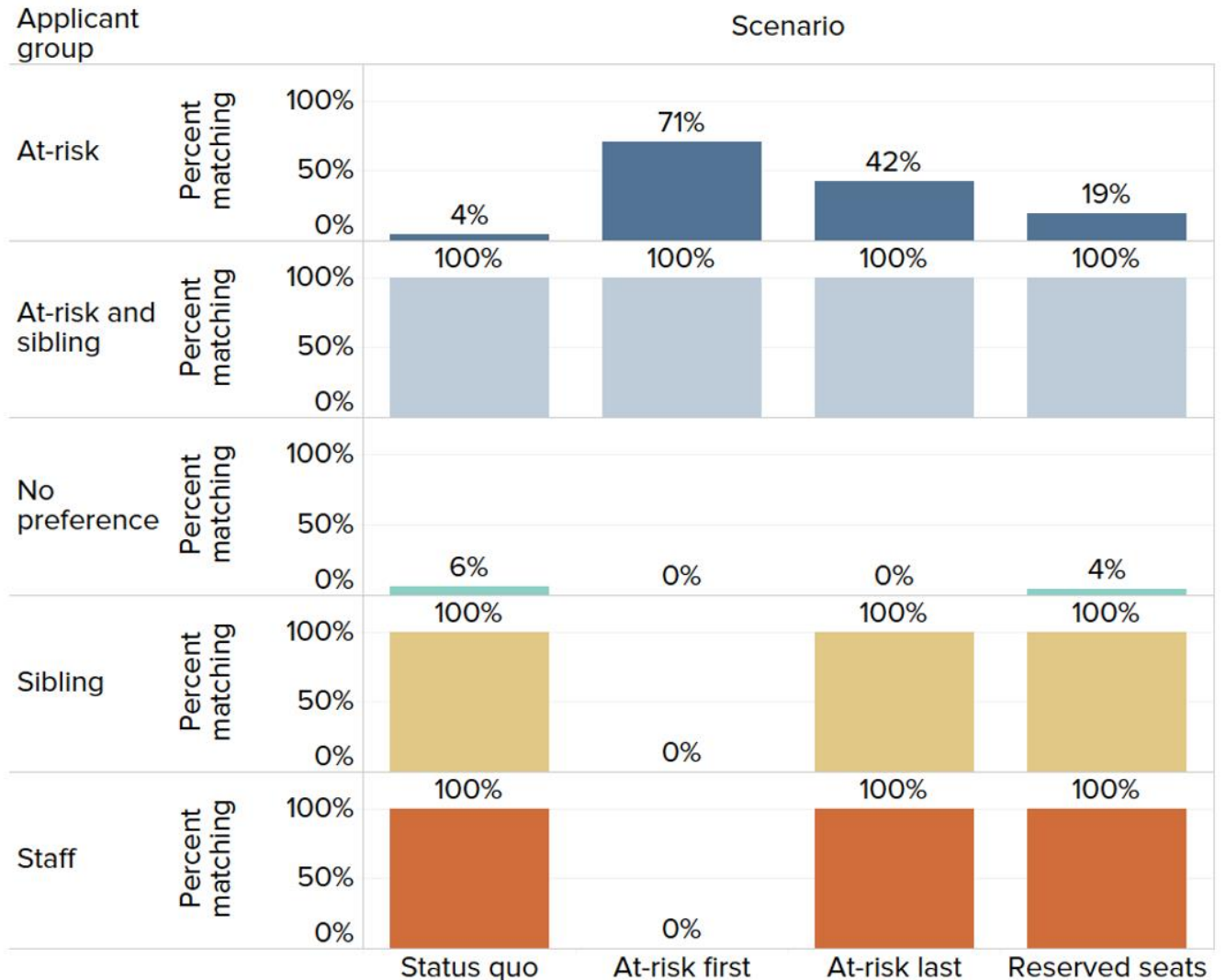
Findings: Match rate

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

Percent matching by group and scenario

Applicant group		Scenario		

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis.
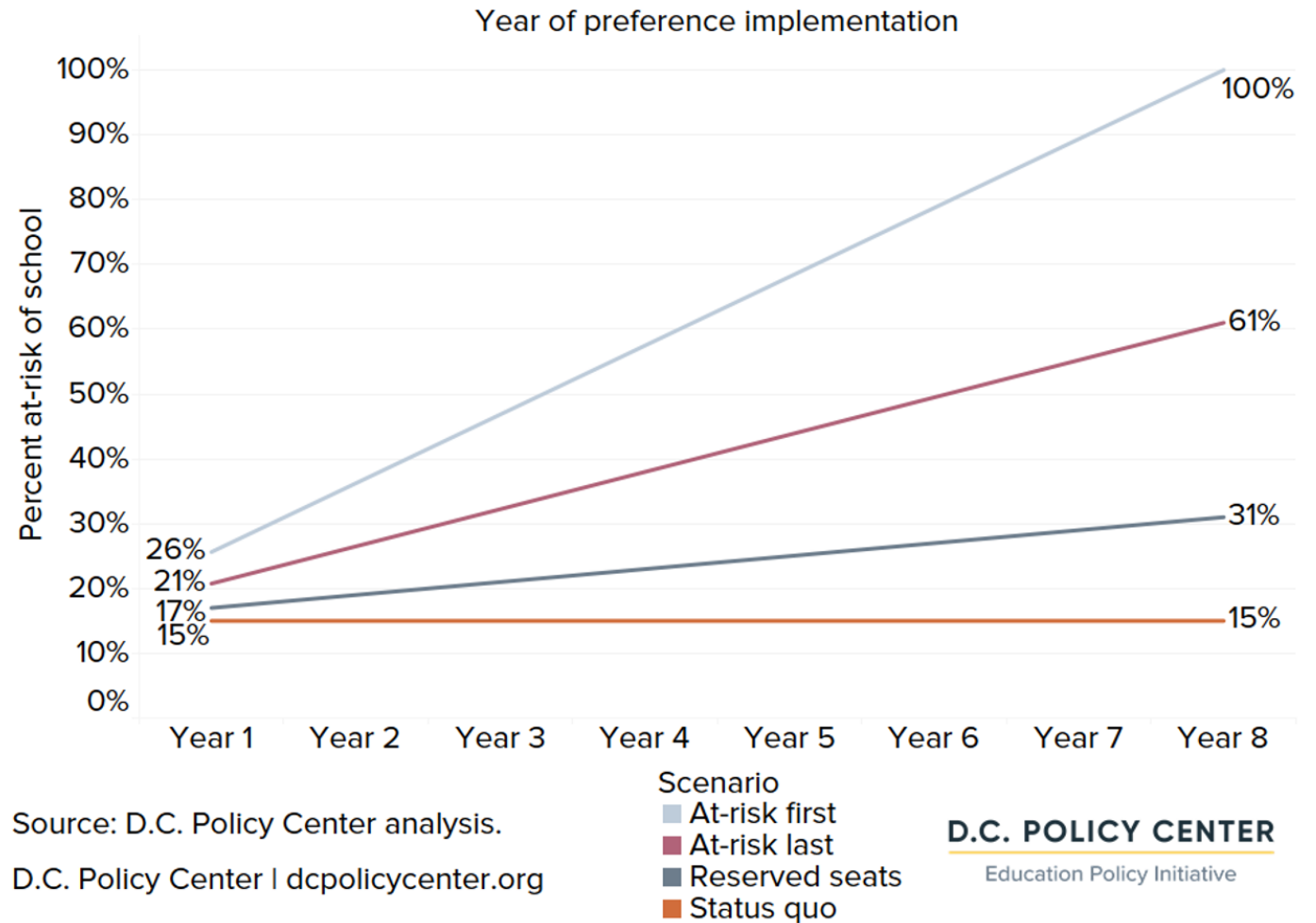
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Findings: over time

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

Year of preference implementation

Source: D.C. Policy Center analysis.

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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.

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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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