



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Addressing the Student Achievement Gap Through Economic Diversity in DC Schools

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Changes to school admission policies, announced last week by Mayor Gray along with changes to school boundaries, would improve access to high-performing DC Public Schools and charter schools for low-income students, starting two years from now. Enhancing economic diversity will help address the large achievement gap in the city, without limiting the educational options for middle- and higher-income students.

The new mayor in 2015 may choose to revisit the changes in school boundaries, which were developed by the Advisory Committee on Student Assignment after several months of dialogue with DC residents. While this may make sense, the policies to improve access to high-performing schools are worth keeping.

The two key elements of the new policy are:

Prioritize Placement for At-Risk Students: Starting in the 2016-17 school year, DCPS and public charter schools would set aside 25 percent of their out-of-boundary seats in the lottery process for low-income students. Currently, 20 DCPS and 12 public charter [schools](#) would be affected because of their low poverty rates.

This would promote socio-economic diversity in schools, which is linked to improving outcomes for low-income students without adversely affecting middle class students, as long as a core of middle class children attend the school.

The Advisory Committee recommended that this preference apply to charter schools, in addition to DCPS, which would require a change in DC law. Because charter schools now account for nearly half of all students in publicly funded schools in DC, the new policy will have the greatest effect if it applies to all schools in the city. The Public Charter School Board opposes this change, which would mean a citywide charter school would need to set aside 25 percent of its available seats for low-income students.

Subsidize Public Transit: Low-income families will need access to affordable transportation to truly be able to take advantage of this new opportunity. While students can now ride MetroBus for free, their parents cannot, which is a problem for parents with very young children. That's why the

Committee's recommendation to offer free bus passes to parents of students in Pre-K3 through 5th grade makes sense.

For more information on the final set of recommendations released by the Deputy Mayor for Education, see [here](#).