

# 01

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

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# 1.1 CONTEXT FOR EDUCATION FACILITY PLANNING IN WASHINGTON, DC

The DC Public Education Master Facilities Plan 2018 (MFP) is a comprehensive and forward-looking document that provides the opportunity for strategic and sustainable public school facility planning and management. As a planning study, the MFP incorporates information about District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools to better understand the current landscape and future needs associated with public school facilities. With emphasis on the integration of District-wide data and analysis, it is intended to be a resource for policy makers, local education agencies, education support organizations, and the general public.

The preparation of this MFP in 2018 is timely for Washington, DC. Across the District, the overall population is growing, and public school enrollment is growing along with it, at a rate of 2.8% per year since the 2008-2009 school year (SY2008-09). In SY2017-18, the base year for the analysis in this MFP, there were approximately 700,000 District of Columbia residents and 91,484 public school students. Based on demographic projections, the growth trend is expected to continue over the medium to long term. The ability to plan for this growth and simultaneously improve public educational options directly informs the current and future facility needs.

The role of this MFP in the school facility planning process is to analyze the current state of public education facilities, forecast future public school enrollment growth, and anticipate challenges and opportunities over the next

ten years. The MFP provides options for ways to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities that, taken holistically, can be used by District leaders to inform facilities planning and develop future policies. Based on this study, the District will prepare an implementation plan that will define actions to be carried out in the future, including at the individual facility level.

The current educational landscape provides sound foundational context and is the starting point for the MFP. It is important to understand Washington, DC's two public education sectors (DCPS and public charters), the recent extensive facility modernization and renovation effort, the trajectory of the facility modernization process, and the relationship between public schools and public transportation.

Fundamental to the MFP is the distinction between schools and facilities. The MFP will focus primarily on facilities as its unit of analysis, except where noted. A facility refers to the physical building in which a school is located. One facility may house multiple schools from different Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (referred to as a co-location); alternatively, one school may be located in multiple facilities. Education campuses are facilities with only one school that have multiple grade bands (examples of grade bands include elementary, middle, and high schools).

A factor that is generally considered important in education facility planning is school quality. The MFP study does not incorporate this as the new public school rating system, the School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) accountability framework, will be released after the completion of this report. It is recommended that the MFP study findings be complemented by the STAR framework when it becomes available.

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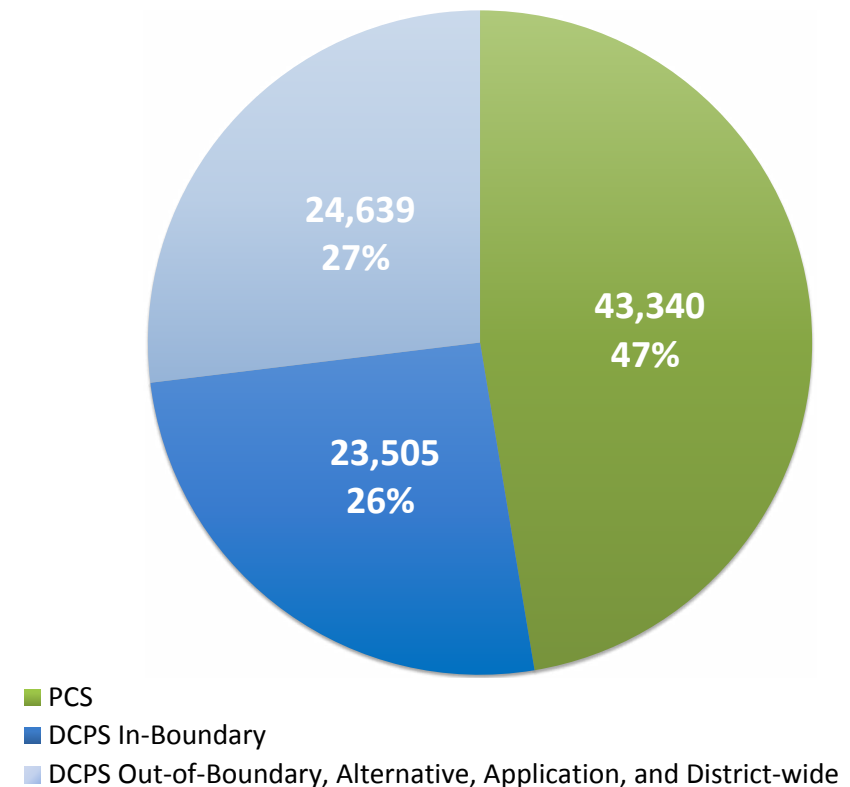
Of the 212 public school facilities in Washington, DC in SY2017-18, 108 are DCPS school facilities and fall under one LEA. There are a total of 95 public charter school facilities operated by 66 LEAs. There are nine co-located school facilities, seven of which house only public charter schools.

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### A Strong System of By-Right Schools and Schools of Choice

Public education in Washington, DC is based on a core system of high-quality public “schools of right” in every neighborhood, complemented by high-quality public schools of choice. DCPS, the LEA that manages Washington, DC’s neighborhood schools, constitutes one educational sector; the other sector includes all of the public charter schools (PCS). Introduced in 1996 and first opened in 1997, public charter schools are run by individual non-profit organizations under agreements approved by the DC PCSB. As of SY2017-18, there were a total of 67 LEAs (DCPS plus 66 public charter LEAs).

The majority of DCPS schools utilize the school of right system, meaning that students living within an enrollment zone or school boundary have the right to attend that school facility at any time throughout the school year. Conversely, public charter schools are not required to enroll students that live within a particular zone or boundary; public charter school enrollment policies do not have any geography or proximity component, other than the requirement that students live in Washington, DC. Instead, public charter schools are lottery-based, meaning students can only enroll in a school if they receive a match through the My School DC (MSDC) Lottery or a lottery run by an LEA (if it does not participate in the MSDC Lottery). Approximately half of public charter school students are enrolled in a charter school outside of their home ward.



**Figure 1.1** SY2017-18 Public School Enrollment Breakdown  
Source: AECOM 2018

**Figure 1.1** illustrates the vitality of the dual sector public education system. As of SY2017-18, approximately 53% of Washington, DC’s students enrolled in DCPS; 47% were enrolled in public charter schools.

The District of Columbia offers students a variety of enrollment options: students can either attend their neighborhood DCPS school (i.e., in-boundary school of right) or enter the common lottery to attend an out-of-boundary DCPS school, a citywide DCPS school (that is not a school of right), a DCPS application high school (sometimes referred to as “selective schools”), a DCPS alternative school designed to help the most challenged students complete their education, or a public charter school. There are no “by-right” DCPS Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 programs. These programs require that students enter the lottery in order to enroll. In-boundary students receive preference in the lottery.

### **Recent District-Wide Facility Investment**

Washington, DC has made great strides over the last decade in modernizing DCPS school facilities. The District has steadily ramped up investment in public schools and implemented an increasingly comprehensive and effective system for developing and managing public school facilities.

Since 1998, the District has invested \$3.9 billion in capital investment in DCPS school facilities. Since 2002, the District has modernized and renovated 87 DCPS school buildings across all eight wards.

In line with the extensive investment in facility capital improvements, the District recently adopted a new, robust, systematic facility assessment program, with the intention of promoting comprehensive and effective management of the District’s real assets, including schools. The District is currently in the middle of a three-year process (2017-2020) of assessing the condition of all school facilities under its ownership. After this initial three-year effort, the District will evaluate the physical condition of each of the District-owned school facilities every three years.

### **Transportation**

The District of Columbia relies on its extensive bus and rail systems to ensure students can attend school. Students are eligible for free bus and rail passes through a collaboration between the District of Columbia government and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Previously, students could ride buses for free, and could ride Metrorail for a subsidized rate. Since 2015, the District has expanded the Kids Ride Free (KRF) program, so that students are now able to ride the rail systems for free as well. The program allows students to ride for free on Metrobus, the DC Circulator, and Metrorail within Washington, DC to get to school and school-related activities. To be eligible, students must be a resident of the District of Columbia between the ages of 5 and 21, and must be enrolled in an elementary or secondary public, private charter, or parochial school located within Washington, DC. Kids considered “Wards of DC,” or those in the foster care system, are eligible for KRF as well.

Private bus transportation is provided for students with special needs. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education Division of Student Transportation (OSSE DOT) provides transportation for eligible special needs students in the District of Columbia to both public schools and non-public schools. OSSE oversees transportation equipment and maintenance, generates route maps, and supervises staff. OSSE requires that LEAs and schools that participate in student transportation submit a biannual Certification for Student Transportation.

## 1.2 MFP OBJECTIVES

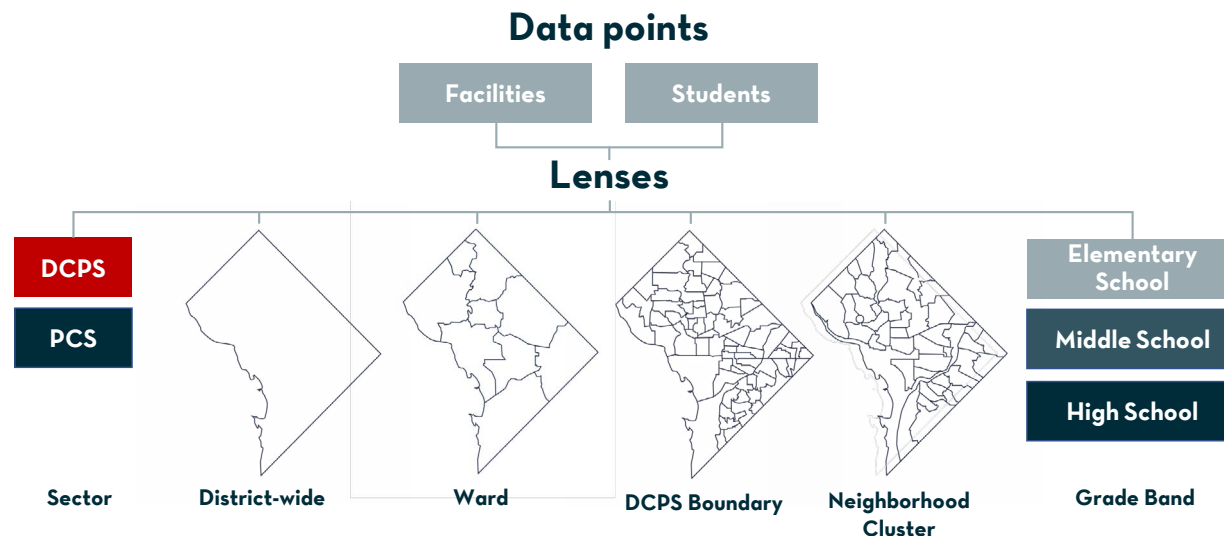
The 2018 MFP has the distinction of being the first master facilities planning study to take into account both DCPS and public charter school facilities. While the MFP, consistent with the District law, does not recommend or outline specific capital improvement projects for public charter school facilities, it studies the entire public school system in a holistic manner, and includes a thorough review of growth plans submitted by both DCPS schools and by public charter LEAs. Public charter LEA growth plans outline public charter school expansion plans and facility needs, which are also taken into account by the MFP.

While earlier iterations of the MFP focused almost exclusively on DCPS buildings, and projected to a five-year planning horizon, the 2018 MFP considers the facility planning needs of all LEAs, and outlines options for aligning facility supply with anticipated districtwide enrollment growth. This MFP provides analysis and recommendation options for the District to use to develop specific facility strategies in concert with community feedback.

Three overarching objectives have guided the MFP process:

- + Provide critical analysis and future estimations to address the needs of Washington, DC's public education facilities.
- + Outline key opportunities and challenges in current educational facilities planning processes in the District, and include recommendations for future educational facilities planning processes.
- + Develop a report, data visualizations, and publicly-available data sets for LEAs, District agencies, residents, and other education stakeholders to use in their work to improve public education in Washington, DC.

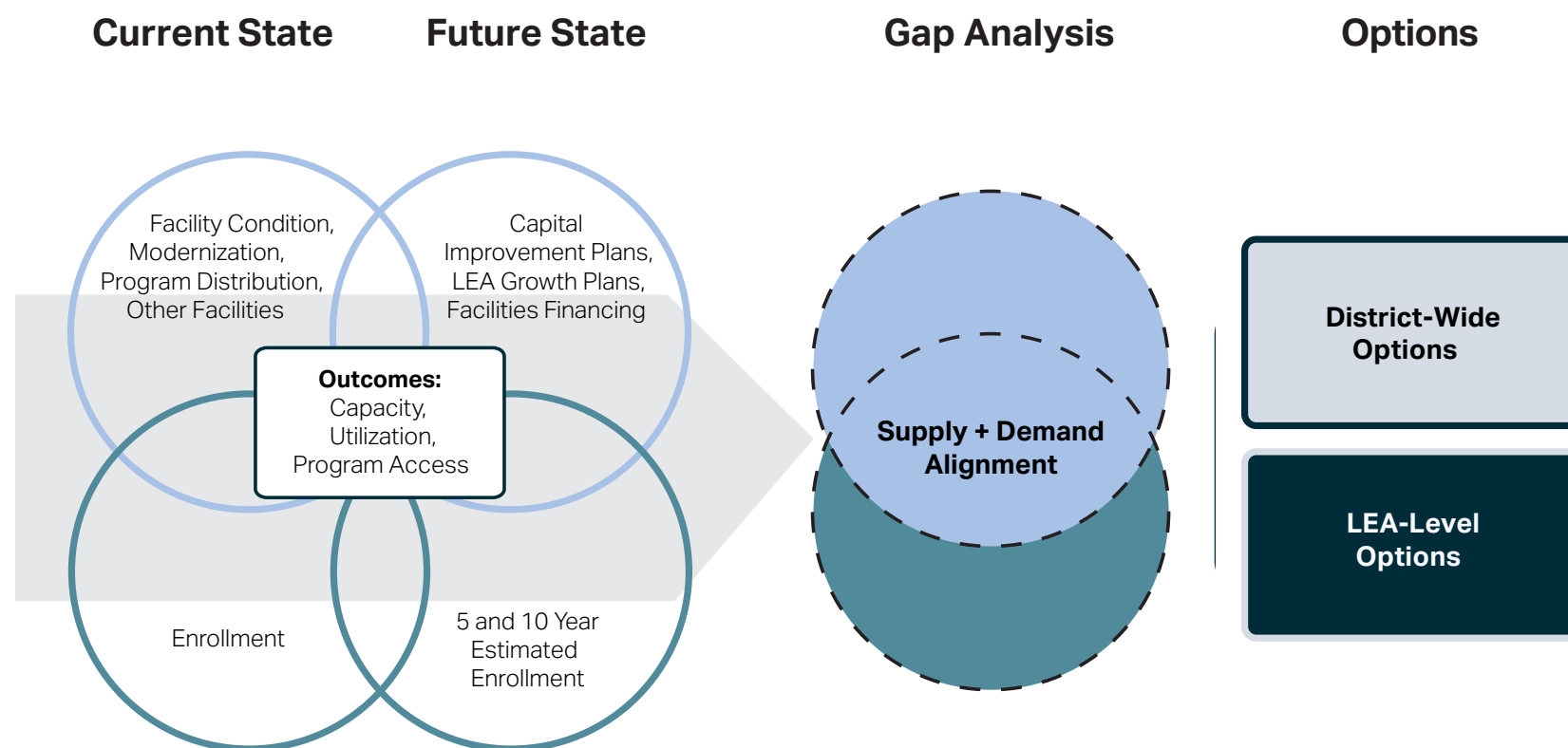
It is important to note that this MFP will describe the current state of facilities as of SY2017-18, and outline what the future may hold, as well as provide recommendations to address. The District will then take those recommendations and formulate an integrated implementation plan.



**Figure 1.2** Key Data Points and Lenses of the MFP  
Source: AECOM 2018

## 1.3 STUDY METHODOLOGY

The MFP uses population forecasts, enrollment projections, utilization analyses, LEA growth plans, and facility data to better understand the current landscape of Washington, DC's public school facilities (Pre-K through Adult schools provided by DC Public Schools and public charter schools), as well as public education facility needs ten years from now (see **Figure 1.2**). The MFP provides recommendations on District-wide and LEA-level options developed with the goal of optimizing the use of current educational space, retaining educational space for educational purposes, growing the total portfolio of space for educational use, and streamlining planning processes, data collection, and knowledge-sharing. The data points and “lenses” being applied as part of the MFP study are shown in **Figure 1.3**.



**Figure 1.3** Study Methodology  
Source: AECOM 2018

## 1.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is fundamental to the MFP methodology. The community engagement strategy was structured around a series of public workshops across Washington, DC and in-person surveys. In April, August, and October, community organization members, school parents, DCPS employees, District of Columbia government employees, and public charter school employees participated in round-table and large group discussions. In-person surveys were conducted outside recreation centers, libraries, grocery stores, metro stations, apartment complexes, and schools. Over 600 people collectively participated in the public outreach process, as shown in **Figure 1.5**.

Three overarching themes emerged as a result of the feedback received during the community engagement process:

1. Washington, DC and its residents have not been provided with a clearly articulated vision for what it means to be a dual-sector public school system founded on strong neighborhood schools supported by choice. Public sentiment is that the critical next step is to engage the community in the creation of an educational vision from which all educational policy decisions, including facilities-based decisions, should flow. The desire is for holistic decision-making that addresses issues related to equity, quality, access, and facilities in an integrated fashion.
2. Data transparency and accountability around facilities-oriented decisions is essential. Public sentiment strongly advocates for

transparency around how data is used to inform planning decisions, with the sharing of information across sectors and with the public as a critical component.

3. While planning decisions must be contextualized by a comprehensive District-wide educational vision, the District must also address the specific needs of the wards, school boundaries, and neighborhoods.

Key themes and takeaways that emerged from the community engagement process are as follows:

- + Understanding how DCPS and public charter schools are projecting enrollment growth and the factors that influence enrollment
- + Needing more options for specialized programs in all areas of Washington, DC
- + Finding creative solutions for underutilized and overcrowded schools
- + Understanding more about co-location and how it is done now for both sectors
- + Understanding the process for upcoming DCPS modernizations
- + Ensuring that there is transportation equity for all students to get to neighborhood schools and schools of choice
- + Emphasizing the importance of technology, facility maintenance, and safety across all wards

**Figure 1.4** summarizes the feedback received during the community meetings held in April.

Provide Current Facilities Landscape	Identify Overcrowding and Underutilization	Offer Creative Solutions to Facility Needs	Understand Student Enrollment Patterns	Project DCPS Enrollment into the Future	Describe LEA Growth Plans	Identify Future Gaps in Facility Availability	Additional Questions/Considerations
Transparency in process	Seek early childhood education opportunities in underutilized facilities	Repurpose vacant facilities and reclaim DCPS inventory	Movement across ward boundaries as a factor in enrollment	Factors that influence enrollment: • School programs • Quality • New development • Housing costs	What is the vision for the future relationship between DCPS and PCS?	Gentrification	How is diversity considered in planning?
Publicly available data		Short-term building use opportunities	Factor in temporary & multi-family housing			Density and proximity of schools in a ward/neighborhood	Must engage: • Education Councils • ANCs • Community Groups
Unique amenities like recreation	Match school capacity to location of the population	Offer programs from early childhood to post-secondary	Demographic changes	Survey parents • Why are they sending their child to a particular school?		Incentives to fill the gaps	• Organizations that cross communities • Attend community events
Cost and equity of modernizations	Intersection of program capacity with program intent	Explore co-location opportunities	Feeder Patterns			Size and scale of modernizations	Equity in programs and facilities across schools
Location of excess seats		Explore options for rapid access to finance				Equity in program opportunity within each neighborhood/ward	
School / program deserts		Smarter/more creative use of space				Turn recommendations into action	Transportation and mobility

-- MUST ADDRESS SPECIFIC NEEDS OF WARDS, NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES -

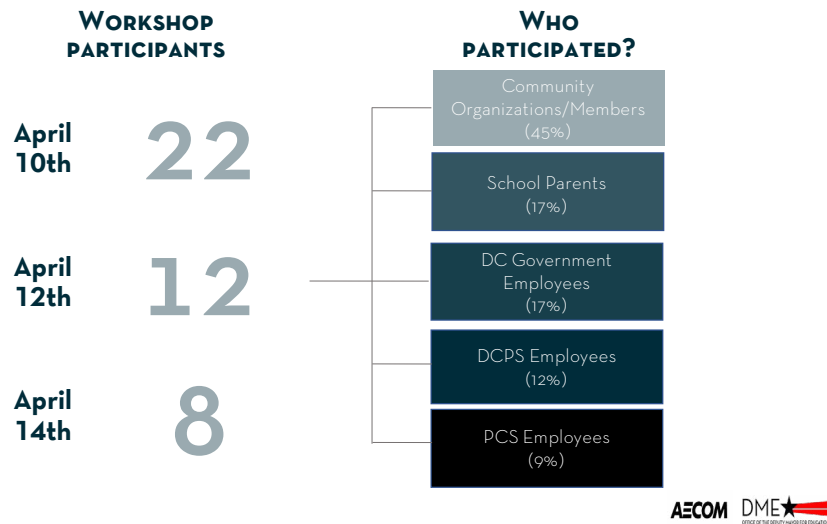
**AECOM**

**DME**   
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION

**Figure 1.4** Participant Feedback from the April Meetings  
Source: AECOM 2018



## April Public Meetings: Participation Summary



## August Community Engagement: Survey Summary

### SURVEY TO COLLECT FEEDBACK ON MFP GOALS

# of Participants = 510

Survey period:  
August 21 – September 11, 2018

In-person survey conducted outside recreation centers, libraries, grocery stores, metro stations, apartment complexes, and schools.

### WHO PARTICIPATED?

Parents of  
1 public school child: 24%  
2+ public school children: 76%

Parents of  
DCPS students: 70%  
PCS students: 47%\*

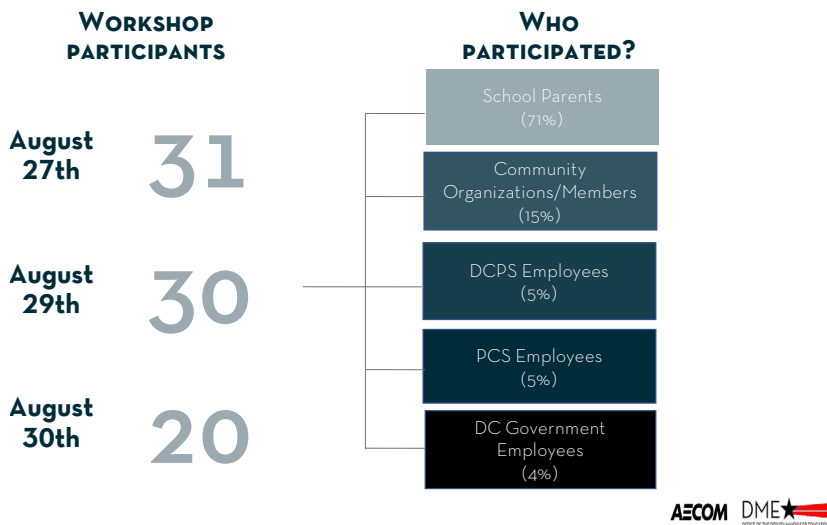
All wards - proportional to  
where public school students  
live

All PK-12 grade bands - similar  
to enrollment patterns

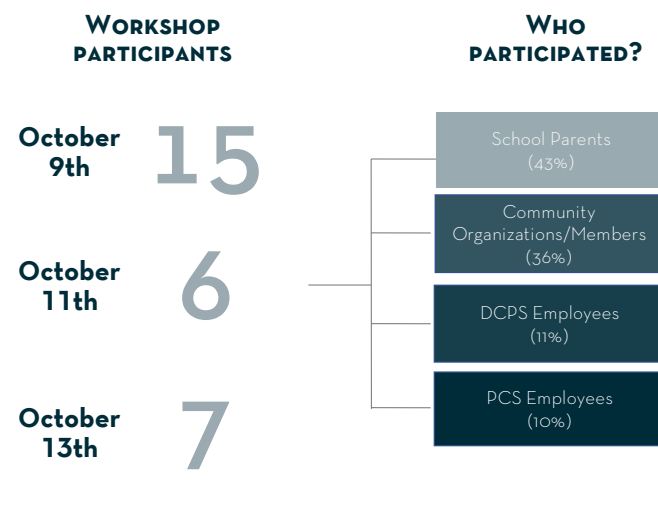
\*Sum is greater than  
100% due to multiple  
children per family.

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## August Public Meetings: Participation Summary



## October Public Meetings: Participation Summary



**Figure 1.5** April, August, and October Meetings  
Source: AECOM 2018

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