

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser



MEMORANDUM

TO: Rick Cruz, DC Public Charter School Board Chair
Saba Bireda, DC Public Charter School Board Vice Chair

CC: Scott Pearson, DC Public Charter School Board Executive Director

FROM: Paul Kihn, DC Deputy Mayor for Education

DATE: May 15, 2019

SUBJECT: A facilities assessment of new public charter applications, Spring 2019

I am providing the following memo and attached presentation to support your review of the 2019 public charter school applications, in particular the Board's assessment of demonstrated need. The information included here focuses on how the applicant schools intersect with the current supply of public schools (DCPS and public charters), and the relevant number of public school students now and in the future.

We have based our analysis on our recently released DC Public Education Master Facilities Plan 2018 and other planning data. To be clear, the following information focuses solely on facility utilization and population growth forecasts and does not account for the other critical aspects factored in the Board's decision such as school quality and parent demand.

Specifically, the following information contributes strictly to one of the five criteria that you use, as outlined in your 2019 Charter Application Guidelines, to assess the merits of the public charter applications; the Board also assesses the applications on other important aspects such as mission, inclusiveness, and ability to deliver the educational objectives of the program at a high quality – all criterial criteria that we do not address here.

We see this limited, facility-based information as a step towards the shared planning goals that the Cross Sector Collaboration Task Force recommended across the sectors. We look forward in future years to incorporating the other two broad categories of critical information: quality, including the School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) framework and school-specific STAR ratings, and student and parent demand, as measured by such things as enrollment patterns, travel distances, and lottery applications.



I am very proud of the successes that our public schools – DCPS and public charters – have made over the past 10 years including increases in student performance across virtually all subgroups, as well as increases to student enrollment, which is a testament to the growing demand of our public schools. As we continue to plan for public education and the continued success of our students, it is critical to focus on improving our existing schools as well as ensuring any new school options are of the highest quality and meet identified community needs. To this end, I greatly appreciate your nationally-recognized chartering-authorizing practices, and your clear willingness to consider the best interests of families and students in your decision making.

Assessed Facility and Capacity Need of the High School Applications

From a facility and capacity standpoint, the DME raises concerns about adding up to four new 9th-12th grade high schools to an already significant number of high schools that are operating with relatively small enrollments, have available empty seats, and are competing for a relatively limited number of high-school aged students. In addition, some of the existing LEAs would like to replicate, expand within their current buildings, or expand after finding new facilities, which would already increase the supply of high school seats even more.

Currently there are 37 public high schools serving almost 19,000 high school students. Of that amount, 19 high schools are public charters serving approximately 8,100 students. Thirteen of the 19 public charter high schools serve just high school grades (9-12 grades) while another six also include middle grades. For DCPS, 16 high schools serve grades 9th-12th while another two DCPS schools serve grades 6th to 12th.

The majority of the public charter high schools are relatively small. The 2014 [Adequacy Study](#) contracted by the DME took an in depth look at the Uniform per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) at that time and identified the financial challenges of operating small schools. The report authors estimated that a “small high school” was 400 students. As of SY18-19, 12 out of the 19 public charter high schools and six out of the 18 DCPS high schools were under that enrollment threshold and another three public charter high schools and one DCPS high school had under 475 students. This means that there are 15 public charter high schools and seven DCPS high schools sustaining their building and staffing models with a small student population. All four of the stand-alone high school applications are planning for relatively small high schools, between 400 and 475 students. Again, these small sizes bring relatively high fixed costs.

Many of the current high schools are also not full when we compare their audited enrollment to programmatic capacity. Programmatic capacities reflect the maximum number of students that can be housed in each school building given the school’s facility and existing educational programs, class size, schedule, and staffing. PCS high schools (excluding those education campuses that span multiple grade levels) have an average utilization rate of 74% and DCPS high schools (excluding those education campuses that span multiple grade levels) have an average utilization rate of 70%. This



results in 5,277 unfilled seats in high schools, where it is the only school in the building. When we look at the distribution of these unfilled seats, we see that they are in all wards but Wards 2 and 3. Three of the four new 9th-12th grade charter applicants are interested in locating in the wards where there are already unfilled seats.

Another aspect that the Board should take into account is current LEAs plans for growth. DCPS is opening Bard High School next year as well as the Early College Academy at Coolidge High School, and after modernization will be expanding Banneker High School's enrollment. According to growth plans collected for the Master Facility Plan, seven public charter schools would like to replicate or expand into high school and other existing public charters would like to increase their high school enrollments (as opposed to replicating their program), which would require a new building. To be clear these are aspirational goals that would require some LEAs to amend their charters to replicate or increase their enrollment ceilings. However, if these aspirational goals of existing LEAs came to fruition, they would total 3,002 potentially new high school seats, which should be considered when assessing capacity and unmet need.

Another consideration is whether there are enough students to fill the existing and future supply of high schools. The District's high school age population has incrementally declined over the past three decades – between 2010 and 2017 it was estimated to have decreased by 1,300 youth. The Office of Planning estimates that high school age students will not start increasing until after 2020 and then more substantially after 2025.

Taking into account the current high school enrollment plus the current unfilled seats in public high schools (which takes into account LEAs growing out grades and this year's school closures into account), in addition to the growth plans of existing LEAs and the new high school applications, total public high school enrollment aspires to be as high as 28,973 students by SY22-23, surpassing the estimated high school population in 2022 (21,240 14 to 17 year olds). The excess seats described earlier raise additional questions about the potential for facilities sharing between any new school (regardless of sector) and existing schools.

Assessed Facility and Capacity Need of the Middle School Applications

The picture is similar for public middle schools, although the population growth has begun sooner than the high school aged population. There are 37 schools serving predominantly middle school grades enrolling approximately 12,000 students. Of those, 23 are public charter schools serving almost 6,300 students. The grade configurations of the middle school public charters vary with nine schools serving 5th-8th grade, another seven charter schools serving 4th-8th grades, and six serving 6th-8th grades. This also does not take into account the PK-8th schools that exist or the 6th-12th grade schools that offer middle grades as well. DCPS offers 13 6th-8th grade middle schools and one 4th-8th grade middle school.



The majority of the middle schools also have relatively small enrollments. The DME’s [Adequacy Study](#) estimated that small middle schools – estimated at 300 students – would have challenges meeting fixed costs compared to middle schools enrolling at least 600 students. As of SY18-19, 11 public charter middle schools enroll 300 middle school students or fewer and another 10 public charter middle schools have up to only 375 students. For DCPS middle schools, six enroll 300 or fewer students and another four enroll 375 or fewer students. The new applicants are also requesting relatively low enrollment ceilings, between 180 and 320 students.

Like the high schools, there is also unused capacity in the current supply of middle schools, particularly for DCPS. Overall, stand-alone middle schools have a 66% utilization rate with a notable difference across sectors – where public charter middle schools are 98% utilized and DCPS are 60% utilized. This results in having approximately 3,605 empty seats in just “stand alone” middle school facilities, primarily in DCPS. These excess seats are predominantly in Wards 6, 7, and 8. As described in the high school section, the excess seats raise additional questions about the potential for facilities sharing between any new school (regardless of sector) and existing schools.

Like the high schools, some currently operating LEAs aspire to replicate or expand their middle school seats, as indicated by the growth plans released in the MFP. This includes DCPS’s Ida B. Wells Middle School (co-located with Coolidge High School) opening next year. Five existing public charter LEAs are interested in expanding or replicating middle schools as well, and other existing public charters would like to increase their middle school enrollments (as opposed to replicating their program), which would require a new building. Altogether these additional aspirational growth plans would total a potential new 1,788 middle school seats anticipated in the next 5 years, although some would need the approval of the Board in order to do so.

In regards to the population, the 11-13 year old age span (or the age we use to estimate the middle school population) is more robust than the high school aged children, although not at the scale of younger children. The DC Office of Planning estimates that the middle school aged population will increase by approximately 3,000 students between 2020 and 2025 (reaching 19,977 11-13 year olds) and another 3,000 in the five years after that (reaching 23,282 11-13 year old children).

Comparing current middle school enrollment plus the current unfilled seats in middle schools (which takes into account LEAs growing out their grades as well as the upcoming school closures), in addition to the growth plans of existing LEAs and the new middle school applications, total public middle school enrollment is estimated to reach 21,519, surpassing the estimated middle school population in 2022 as well (17,995 11 to 13 year olds).

Any new school openings to accommodate this growth should be carefully considered alongside the health and sustainability of schools that exist now and will be opening in the new future.



Where Specialized Programs Are Currently Offered

This section of the memo focuses on the following four specialized programs: Montessori, dual language, International Baccalaureate, and adult/early childhood programming.

One application is for a Montessori middle/high school. In SY18-19, there are 10 schools offering Montessori programming, and one will be replicating and locating East of the River in SY19-20. Of those 10 schools, only 1 offers middle school grades, Capitol Hill Montessori in Ward 6. Capitol Hill Montessori attracts students from across the city, and predominantly from Wards 7, 8, 5 and 6.

Regarding the language immersion program, currently 24 schools offer dual language or language immersion programs (25 next year), and none offer Arabic as a dual language program. The attached presentation includes a map that shows the locations of dual language programs across the city. The Arabic public charter targets Ward 6 for its location where there is only one other dual language Spanish program, Tyler ES. As we know from the long wait lists posted by dual language programs and from our community engagement processes, dual language programs are in high demand.

In SY18-19, 15 schools offer an International Baccalaureate (IB) program across the city: five elementary schools, three middle schools, four high schools, and three education campuses (one PK3-8, two 6th-12th). They are located in every ward except for Ward 7.

And the final specialized program included in this memo is the adult and early childhood program. The school is designed to (according to the application) “provide adult learners the opportunity to further their education, increase their earning power by earning critical job skills, and provide a quality educational experience for their preschoolers.” As we know, one LEA currently provides this similar type of programming. It has four locations sites in Wards 1, 4, and 5. However, we do not know if they have waiting lists or have unmet demand. The existing LEA does typically meet its enrollment projection.

Assessed Facility and Capacity Need of the Elementary School Applications

Finally, the Board received two applications for elementary schools: one was discussed earlier in the specialized program section and the other focuses on serving Ward 8 elementary students. The citywide average elementary grade facility utilization for elementary schools is 82%, which is considered the lower range of a balanced supply and demand. In Ward 8 the average utilization for elementary schools is also 82%. This results in Ward 8 having 1,610 empty elementary seats in the ward.

The elementary school aged population has been steadily increasing in Washington, DC since 2010 and is forecasted to continue to increase by almost 8,000 3-10 year olds by 2022. This could result in approximately 1,800 new elementary-age children in Ward 8, slightly more than the existing capacity taking the currently empty seats into account.



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Appendix 1: Assessed Facility and Capacity Needs of the 11 Charter Applications

Applicant Name	Grades Served	Preferred Ward Location	Considerations of Facility, Capacity, and Population Needs
Arabic Language	PK3-5	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ward 6 (preferred ward) has just one dual language program, and is accessible to Ward 7 and 8 that has only has 1 dual language program as well.
I Dream Academy	PK3-5	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citywide elementary grade utilization is 82% and in Ward 8 is also 82%, leaving 1,610 empty elementary seats in the ward. Elementary school aged population is forecasted to increase by almost 8,000 3-10 year olds citywide by 2022, which may result in approximately 1,800 new elementary-age children in Ward 8, slightly more than the existing capacity taking the empty seats into account.
Capital Village	5th-8th	1, 4, 5, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citywide stand-alone MS utilization is 66% (public charter= 98% and DCPS=60%), with unused seats in all wards of applicant interest (ranging from 128 empty seats in W1 to 485 empty seats in W6) Potential MS seat availability taking existing LEA growth plans AND new charter applications into account is 21,519 students, higher than estimated future grade-specific child population of 17,995 11 to 13 year olds Estimated expected enrollment is small (180 students) and appears difficult to maintain robust program on only UPSFF funding
Social Justice School	5th-8th	1, 4, 5, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citywide stand-alone MS utilization is 66% (public charter= 98% and DCPS=60%), with unused seats in all wards of interest (ranging from 128 empty seats in W1 to 485 empty seats in W6) Potential MS seat availability taking existing LEA growth plans AND new charter applications into account is 21,519students, higher than estimated future grade-specific child population of 17,995 11 to 13 year olds
Sojourner Truth School	6th-12th	5 (open to 4, 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No existing high school Montessori program



Applicant Name	Grades Served	Preferred Ward Location	Considerations of Facility, Capacity, and Population Needs
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citywide stand-alone MS utilization is 66% (public charter= 98% and DCPS=60%). In Ward 5 there are 264 unused seats in stand-alone MS. • Potential MS seat availability taking existing LEA growth plans AND new charter applications into account is 21,519 students, higher than estimated future grade-specific child population of 17,995 11 to 13 year olds • Citywide stand-alone HS utilization is 71%, with 975 empty seats in Ward 5 stand-alone high schools • Potential HS enrollment aspires to reach 28,973 high school students when we take into account existing HS enrollment and facility capacity, existing LEA growth plans, and new charter applications. This is substantially higher than the estimated future grade-specific child population of 21,240 14 to 17 year olds.
Evolve	9th - 12th	1, 4, 5, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citywide stand-alone HS utilization is 71%, with the following number of empty seats in Wards 1, 4, 5, and 6 (524, 778, 975, and 455 empty seats, respectively) • Potential HS enrollment aspires to reach 28,973 high school students when we take into account existing HS enrollment and facility capacity, existing LEA growth plans, and new charter applications. This is substantially higher than the estimated future grade-specific child population of 21,240 14 to 17 year olds.
Girls Global	9th - 12th	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citywide stand-alone HS utilization is 71%, with 55 empty seats in Ward 2 • Potential HS enrollment aspires to reach 28,973 high school students when we take into account existing HS enrollment and facility capacity, existing LEA growth plans, and new charter applications. This is substantially higher than the estimated future grade-specific child population of 21,240 14 to 17 year olds.
BOLT Academy	9th - 12th	6, 7, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citywide stand-alone HS utilization is 71%, with the following number of empty seats in Wards 6, 7, and 8 (455, 1531, and 915 empty seats, respectively) • Potential HS enrollment aspires to reach 28,973 high school students when we take into account existing HS enrollment and facility capacity, existing LEA growth plans, and new charter applications. This is substantially higher than the estimated future grade-specific child population of 21,240 14 to 17 year olds.
Garden Education	9th - 12th	7 or 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citywide stand-alone HS utilization is 71%, with 1,531 empty seats in Ward 7 and 915



Applicant Name	Grades Served	Preferred Ward Location	Considerations of Facility, Capacity, and Population Needs
			<p>empty seats in Ward 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential HS enrollment aspires to reach 28,973 high school students when we take into account existing HS enrollment and facility capacity, existing LEA growth plans, and new charter applications. This is substantially higher than the estimated future grade-specific child population of 21,240 14 to 17 year olds.
Anna Julia Cooper	K-12	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No other LEA offers a K-12 program; therefore, cannot compare to existing landscape and did not assess
Aspire to Excellence Academy	Adult/PreK	5 or 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently only 1 Adult/early childhood LEA exists in DC. They operate in 3 locations in Wards 1 and 4.

