

AT-RISK FUNDING IN DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Why At-Risk Funding?

DC public charter schools are serving a **larger percentage** of at-risk students each year, and most public charter schools already have an at-risk student population greater than 40%. In the 2016-2017 school year, an estimated 51% of the entire DC public charter school student body qualified as “at-risk” (see right).

As such, every parent of a public charter school student is directly affected by this issue. That is why it is so important for parents of charter school students to hold their children’s schools and DC policymakers accountable for the proper allocation and management of at-risk funding.



to target the unique needs of at-risk students. However, parents and education stakeholders have raised concerns that schools are using this additional funding to pay for core operations and not specific programs targeted to support at-risk students.

How Do Charter Schools Use At-Risk Funding?

Unlike DCPS schools, DC public charter schools are operated by independent local education agencies (LEAs). Importantly, under current DC law, LEAs are not obligated to report how they spend their at-risk funding to the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB).

To understand how public charter schools use their at-risk funding, DC PCSB conducts an annual survey to gather responses from LEAs. In the 2016 survey, DC PCSB found that most LEAs were investing their at-risk funds into **additional academic interventions, social workers, behavior specialists, before and after school enrichment programming, and summer school.**

Defining “At-Risk”

The Fair Funding Act defines a student as at-risk if they identify as:

1. Homeless;
2. In foster care;
3. Eligible for food stamps or welfare; or
4. One year older, or more, than the expected age for their enrolled grade level.

What Does At-Risk Funding Look Like?

To improve equitable public school funding across the city, the DC Council passed the **Fair Student Funding and School-Based Budgeting Amendment Act** in 2013. This act added, for the first time, an at-risk weight to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF)—meaning that all DC public schools, both DCPS and public charter schools, now receive additional funding based on the number of enrolled students at their school who meet the at-risk criteria.

In the 2016-2017 school year budget, schools were allocated an additional \$2,079 per at-risk student. These funds were intended to go directly to programs and initiatives designed

to target the unique needs of at-risk students. However, parents and education stakeholders have raised concerns that schools are using this additional funding to pay for core operations and not specific programs targeted to support at-risk students.

Are Funds Flowing to the Neediest Schools?

A 2015 report published by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute found that in almost half of the lowest 40 performing DCPS schools, at-risk students received less than \$1,000 per student in additional funding. That is \$1,079 less than the UPSFF amount and \$2,906 less than the DME’s DC Education Adequacy Study suggests.

Is Enough Money Going to At-Risk Funds?

- Currently, the UPSFF allocates \$2,079 per student who meets the at-risk criteria.
- In 2014, the Deputy Mayor for Education released the DC Education Adequacy Study, which called for the at-risk weight to equal \$3,906 per student, a difference of almost \$2,000 more than what is currently being allocated to schools.

Does the At-Risk Criteria Include the Most Vulnerable Populations?

- In the 2015 “DC PCSB Report on the Use of Per-Pupil At-Risk Funds in DC Public Charter Schools,” three LEAs reported the new funding formula decreased their overall ability to serve their most vulnerable students.
- At Briya PCS, only 45% of their student body met the at-risk criteria based on the current definition, yet 100% of their Pre-K student body is eligible for the Free and Reduced Priced Meal program.

Are At-Risk Funds Being Used for Their Intended Purposes?

- In a 2015 DC PCSB Report on at-risk funds, many LEAs were concerned by the elimination of per-pupil funding for summer school programs. Eagle Academy PCS, for example, reported that they needed to charge a registration fee for their summer school program due to the new at-risk funding program.

Get Involved

Stay Informed

- Visit DC PCSB’s website to read the [2015 DC PCSB Report on the Use of At-Risk Funds](#), and find out how your PCS used their at-risk funds.
- Learn more about student demographics in DC’s public charter schools by visiting the DC PCSB website.

Participate

- Call your charter school’s administration to make sure they respond to DC PCSB’s survey on use of at-risk funding for 2017.
- Speak with your charter school board’s Parent Representative, about how your school is using at-risk funds.

Become Empowered

- Work with PAVE to draft a testimony before the DME, OSSE, and other agencies on at-risk funding oversight.
- Email PAVE’s Director of Community Engagement and Organizing Raven Willoughby, raven.willoughby@dcpave.org, to find out how you can get involved with PAVE.

