

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD**

**Charter Actions Requiring a Vote**

- Approve a Charter Application (15 yrs)
- Approve a Charter Renewal (15 yrs)
- Approve Charter Continuance (5 or 10 yrs)
- Approve a Charter Amendment Request
- Give a Charter Notice of Concern
- Lift the Charter Notice of Concern
- Commence Charter Revocation Proceedings
- Revoke a Charter
- Board Action, Other:

**Non-Voting Board Items**

- Public Hearing Item
- Discussion Item
- Read into Record

**Policies**

- Open a New Policy or Changes to a Policy for Public Comment
- Approve a New Policy
- Approve an Amendment to an Existing Policy

**PREPARED BY:** Hannah Cousino, Director, School Performance Department

**SUBJECT:** School Expansion Policy

**DATE:** February 23, 2026

---

*The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) is creating the policies and conditions to support a network of public charter schools in Washington, DC, offering families quality, equity, and diverse educational choices. This request aligns with DC PCSB's Strategic Roadmap Priority of Excellent Schools.<sup>1</sup>*

**Recommendation**

DC PCSB staff recommends that its Board open the proposed *School Expansion Policy* for public comment from February 23, 2026, following the public meeting, through April 26, 2026 at 11:59 pm. DC PCSB will consider any public comment received during the public comment period before the final vote.

Written comments may be submitted by mail or email to:

DC Public Charter School Board  
100 M Street SE, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20003  
[public.comment@dcpcsb.org](mailto:public.comment@dcpcsb.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Strategic Roadmap here: <https://bit.ly/3EVeKYq>.

Members of the public may also testify during the public hearing on April 27, 2026. The deadline to sign up is noon on April 27, 2026. The Board is scheduled to vote on the policy at the May 18, 2026 public meeting. More details will be posted on the DC PCSB website.<sup>2</sup>

## **Proposal**

DC PCSB staff seeks to revise the existing *Enrollment Ceiling Increase Policy*, including renaming it the *School Expansion Policy* (Attachment A). As population forecasts for school-age children decline and city conditions change,<sup>3</sup> DC PCSB must create the policies for thoughtful charter sector planning. The *School Expansion Policy*, the proposed *School Reorganization Policy*,<sup>4</sup> and the *Charter Application Guidelines* comprise DC PCSB's suite of sector planning policies and guidance.<sup>5</sup> While these items stand alone, they are interconnected and together provide the framework for responsible sector growth and consolidation.

Pursuant to the School Reform Act, a local education agency (LEA) must submit a petition to revise its charter. The *School Expansion Policy* explains the process by which DC PCSB will review charter amendment petitions pertaining to enrollment ceiling increases (ECI), grades served, and replications.

With the *School Expansion Policy*, DC PCSB staff aims to:

- Increase student access to high-performing schools while encouraging sustainable growth.
- Align the policy with DC PCSB's sector planning approach and the *ASPIRE Policy and Technical Guide (ASPIRE Tech Guide)* so that decisions about growth advance student outcomes,<sup>6</sup> respond to community needs, and sustain a quality, diverse charter sector over time.
- Expand the current policy's scope to encompass three types of expansion—enrollment ceiling increases, grades served, and campus replications—in order to make DC PCSB decision-making more transparent and cohesive for school leaders and community members.
- Set clear and rigorous standards for evaluating past performance, leadership capacities, and expansion plans—factors critical for successful growth.

---

<sup>2</sup> Visit the “Public Comment” page on DC PCSB's website here: <https://bit.ly/4rrpTZB>.

<sup>3</sup> See the DC Office of Planning's population forecasts here: <http://bit.ly/45gGGXc>.

<sup>4</sup> The proposed policy can be found here: <https://bit.ly/46qFyjJ>.

<sup>5</sup> The 2025 guidelines can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3X9vRkD>. DC PCSB will release the 2026 guidelines next month.

<sup>6</sup> Per the *ASPIRE Tech Guide*, “DC PCSB awards high-performing schools with eligibility to replicate or expand their programs.”<sup>6</sup> Schools that earn a Level 1 on ASPIRE are generally eligible to grow, whereas schools that earn a Level 2 may be eligible. Regardless of level determination, all schools must apply for an expansion and will be evaluated under the proposed *School Expansion Policy*. The proposed *School Expansion Policy* clarifies how DC PCSB will consider ASPIRE performance and other critical factors in its review.

## Definitions

An **ECI** amendment increases the number of students an LEA may receive funding for through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) as established in the maximum enrollment schedule in its charter agreement.

An amendment to the **grades served** changes the grades an LEA may provide instruction to in accordance with the maximum enrollment schedule in its charter agreement.

A **replication** amendment seeks to operate an additional campus within an LEA by replicating an existing campus. Per DC PCSB's *Definition of School, Campus, and Facility Policy*, a campus "operates a distinct grade range with a single school leader responsible for the academic program for the entire grade span of the campus."<sup>7</sup> Each campus has its own goals and academic achievement expectations (charter goals). Further, each campus receives its own accountability report.

## Guiding Principles

Central to DC PCSB's sector planning approach are the following guiding principles. DC PCSB will use them to drive its evaluation of requests to open, expand, merge, or acquire schools.<sup>8</sup>

- **Driving toward excellence.** LEAs must demonstrate a path toward excellence across a comprehensive evaluation of academics, finance, and organizational effectiveness.
- **Need and demand.** LEAs must justify why a campus or program is needed and in demand, contributing to a diverse range of high-quality options.<sup>9</sup>
- **Organizational capacity.** LEA and campus leadership must be strong and stable, and LEA governing boards must demonstrate the capacity to execute the request with fidelity.<sup>10</sup>

## Sector Planning Alignment

Like with requests to open, merge, or acquire schools, DC PCSB will evaluate a proposed expansion across a multi-stage evaluation process, assessing evidence against a comprehensive Standard for Approval. At a minimum, an LEA must meet the standard "Need and Demand." To do so, the LEA must address DC PCSB's most

---

<sup>7</sup> The policy can be found at <https://bit.ly/3rUbWaQ>.

<sup>8</sup> DC PCSB has contracted with DC Policy Center to update its existing Sector Planning Supplement. The revised analysis will be released in winter 2026.

<sup>9</sup> In alignment with the National Association for Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), DC PCSB defines need as "students' access to quality schools, including unique/relevant models, strong outcomes, and other programmatic elements a community may seek." Demand is "the intention of a sufficient number of students to enroll so that the school will meet its enrollment targets."

<sup>10</sup> NACSA defines leadership capacities as the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors a team needs in order to develop and operate a quality school." NACSA explains how an authorizer can gather and evaluate evidence of these capacities here: <https://bit.ly/4hg5S4j>. DC PCSB will use this guidance or its successors to review expansion proposals.

recent city-wide enrollment analysis.<sup>11</sup> While the standards themselves are the same under the *Charter Application Guidelines* and the proposed *School Reorganization Policy*, the *School Expansion Policy* adds unique considerations for ECI, new grades served, and replications. Further, the *School Expansion Policy* uses similar minimum eligibility criteria as in the drafted *School Reorganization Policy*. For example, schools seeking to acquire or expand must demonstrate exemplary or strong academic performance, sustained financial health, and a positive charter review. Expansion plans must also meet DC PCSB's expectations for conservative growth.

### **Proposed Revisions**

Attachment B contrasts the proposed *School Expansion Policy* and the current *ECI Policy*. The table below highlights the differences between the two policies. Broadly, these changes align with DC PCSB's sector planning approach and the *ASPIRE Tech Guide*.

<b>Element</b>	<b>School Expansion Policy</b>	<b>ECI Policy</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECI</li> <li>• New grades served</li> <li>• Campus replications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECI only</li> </ul>
<b>Guiding Principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving toward excellence</li> <li>• Need and demand</li> <li>• Organizational capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None stated</li> </ul>
<b>Minimum Eligibility Criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance (e.g., LEA must earn a Level 1 or 2 on ASPIRE for two-thirds of campuses in two out of the three previous school years)</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Charter Review</li> <li>• Conservative Growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance (e.g., LEA must earn a Tier 1 on most recent PMF for two-thirds of campuses)</li> <li>• Compelling Case for Demand</li> <li>• Community Engagement</li> </ul>
Evaluation Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice of Exploration (optional)</li> <li>• Letter of Intent to which DC PCSB will respond</li> <li>• Written Application</li> <li>• Capacity Interview (optional)</li> <li>• Public Hearing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written Application</li> <li>• Public Hearing</li> <li>• Vote</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> DC PCSB has contracted with DC Policy Center to update its existing *Sector Planning Supplement*, found here: <https://bit.ly/3Tz9yUR>. The revised analysis will be released in winter 2026.

Element	School Expansion Policy	ECI Policy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vote</li> </ul>	
Standard for Approval	<p>LEAs must meet “Need and Demand” standard and cannot miss more than one other standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need and Demand</li> <li>• Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan</li> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Consistency of the Mission</li> <li>• Leadership Capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEA meets minimum eligibility criteria</li> <li>• LEA misses no more than one or two quantitative indicators (e.g., in operation three years, re-enrollment is at least 85%, does not require additional financial monitoring)</li> </ul>

**Background**

The *ECI Policy* was last updated in 2018. This policy relies heavily on the Performance Management Framework (PMF), DC PCSB’s previous academic accountability system. DC PCSB stopped publishing PMF outcomes after 2019 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to the new ASPIRE accountability system. Also, the *ECI Policy*’s scope is limited. There is no policy framework for evaluating the unique dimensions of grade expansions, replications, mergers, or acquisitions.<sup>12</sup>

DC PCSB released temporary guidance in 2023 to explain how it would review ECI, grade expansion, and replication requests until at least the publication of DC PCSB’s revised accountability framework. This guidance, however, can only supplement—not supplant—the *ECI Policy*. Until the Board approves a revised policy, DC PCSB cannot base its decision-making on more recent oversight practices.

In December 2024, DC PCSB approved the *ASPIRE Tech Guide*, then updated it in June 2025. During this time, DC PCSB staff began drafting the proposed *School Expansion and School Reorganization Policies*.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

At DC PCSB’s Policy Summit on October 16, 2025, DC PCSB staff presented on the *ECI Policy* revision process and invited all leaders to participate in a policy working group. DC PCSB staff held three working group sessions with seven school leaders in attendance. Attachment C shows how DC PCSB staff responded to the feedback shared in the working group. In alignment with DC PCSB’s sector planning approach, the proposed *School Expansion Policy* also incorporates feedback solicited for the *School Reorganization Policy*. These revisions include updates to the

---

<sup>12</sup> In conjunction with the *School Expansion Policy*, DC PCSB is considering the *School Reorganization Policy* (formerly *Mergers and Acquisitions Policy*). The Board is scheduled to vote on both policies at its April 27, 2026 meeting.

evaluation timeline; definitions for terms like “need,” “demand,” and “capacity interview;” and the consideration of year-over-year academic performance.

**Attachment(s) to this Proposal**

Attachment A: *School Expansion Policy* (Clean)

Attachment B: *School Expansion Policy* (with *ECI Policy*)<sup>13</sup>

Attachment C: Working Group Feedback

Date: _____
DC PCSB Action: _____Approved _____Approved with Changes _____Rejected
Changes to the Original Proposal:
_____
_____
_____
_____

---

<sup>13</sup> DC PCSB typically provides a redlined version of the policy under revision. However, the proposed changes to the *ECI Policy's* format and content were too extensive for this approach. Therefore, DC PCSB collated the proposed and current policies to contrast them.