



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Where are the charter school deserts in the District of Columbia?

We detail the distribution of schools in Washington, D.C. in order to provide educators and policymakers with information about communities that provide no access to charter schools. Many families lack the financial means to move out of neighborhoods when dissatisfied with their schooling options, so the location of schools is key to ensuring access and equity for all students. Policymakers and parents can use this information to better understand the supply of schooling options in their states and cities—and to press for changes that would improve that supply. Charter operators and authorizers may also find this analysis helpful as they consider where to establish new schools.

What is a charter school desert?

The following maps display where elementary charter schools are located in the District of Columbia. A **charter school desert** is three or more contiguous census tracts that have poverty rates greater than 20 percent but that have no charter schools.

Results

The District of Columbia has 192 public elementary schools, of which seventy are charter schools. The District as a whole has an 18.5 percent poverty rate. The District has three charter school deserts, representing 15 percent of mid- to high-poverty census tracts,¹ located in the northeast and southern parts of the D.C. metro area.

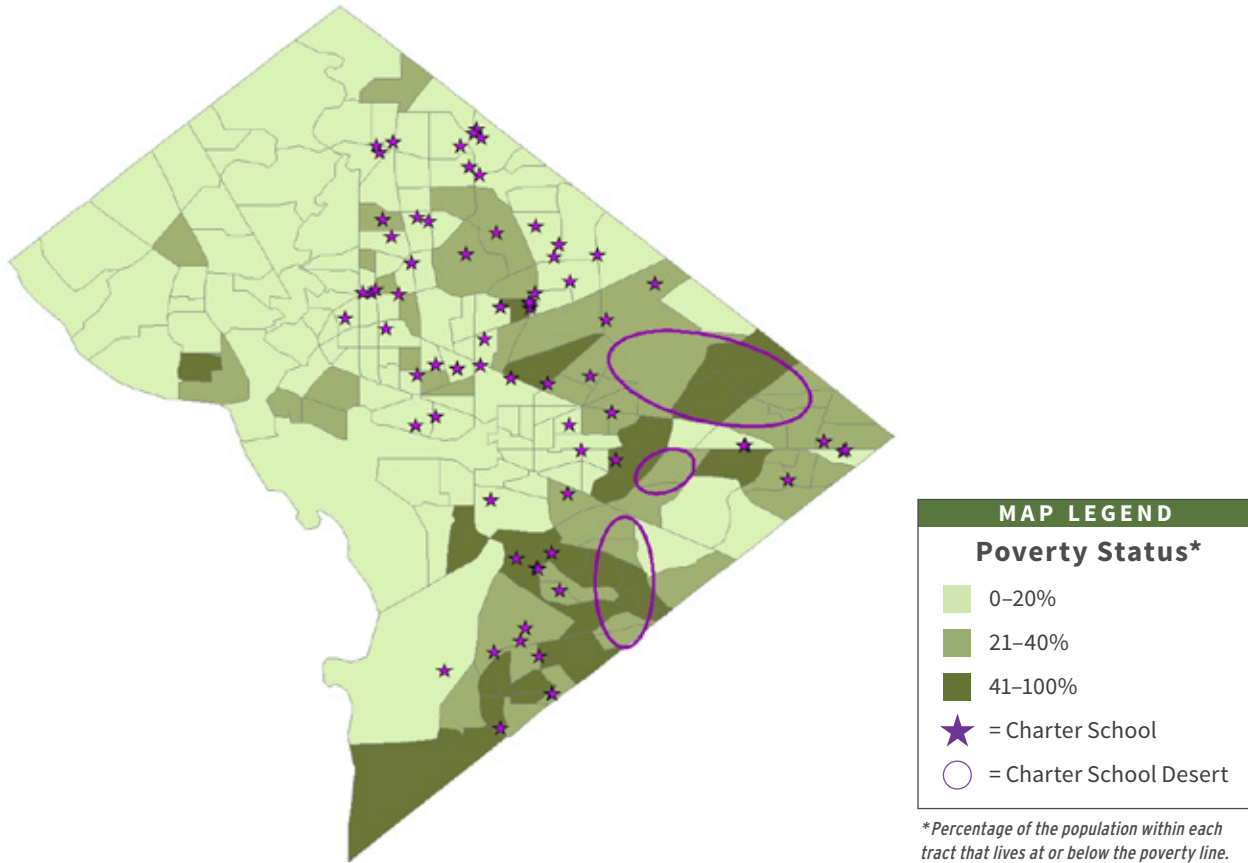
District of Columbia Charter School Deserts by the Numbers

% of the state population living in poverty.....	18.5%
# of public elementary schools.....	192
# of charter schools	70
# of census tracts	179
# of charter school deserts.....	3
Approximate proportion of mid- to high-poverty census tracts that charter school deserts comprise	15%

1. Meaning those census tracts in which more than 20 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty line.

Map 1 shows the census tracts and charter schools in the District of Columbia. Darker green highlights indicate areas in which more than 20 percent of the population lives in poverty.

Map 1: Overview of charter school deserts in the D.C. metro area



Five Things to Keep in Mind

Readers should note several points. First, we have not tried to describe, analyze, or infer how state policies may impact the distribution of charter schools in the District—simply to show which high-poverty areas lack such schools. Second, although we focus on school locations, location alone is insufficient to ensure that families have viable access to schools. Nearby schools may not be available to families if they’re filled to capacity, if policies prohibit transfer, or if transportation is unavailable. Third, some rural areas may lack charter schools simply because the population is too thin to support them. Fourth, our report does not address school quality, but the companion website allows users to view schools’ math and English language arts proficiency data. Finally, visually identifying charter school deserts is inevitably vulnerable to human error, as they may be identified differently based on how contiguous census tracts are positioned and how “desert circles” are drawn.