

Chapter 2

The Planning Environment

Facility plans are developed in a dynamic planning environment, driven by steady school enrollment growth. Since the mid-1980s, when birth rates began to rise and reverse a so-called “baby-bust,” this growth has been accompanied by increased diversity, as seen in the wide range of cultures, languages, and racial and ethnic populations in our cosmopolitan county.

Enrollment growth since 2008 has been particularly strong. Enrollment grew by 22,270 students from the 2008–2009 to the 2017–2018 school year, an average of 2,492 students each year. Enrollment this school year totaled 161,546 students, an increase of 2,536 students from the previous school year. Total school system enrollment is projected to increase by another 7,466 students by the 2023–2024 school year, or approximately 1,244 students per year.

This growth continues to create challenges for our school facilities and capital program. Funding for capital projects has not been sufficient to keep up with enrollment increases. The backlog of school capacity projects is compounded during each capital planning cycle as resident births and migration to the county spur further enrollment growth.

Community Trends

Population

Montgomery County’s overall population is growing and diversifying. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the County’s total population has increased by 153,030 people, or 18%, since 2000, from 873,341 to 1,026,371 people. A significant share of the County’s population increase has resulted from resident births outnumbering deaths by more than 2 to 1. Since 2000, there have been 226,655 births compared to 95,066 deaths in the County, for a net natural population increase of 131,589 residents, accounting for 85% of the County’s overall population increase. Immigration from outside the United States also is contributing to population growth,

and in recent years has countered the outflow of residents to other places. Since 2010, international migration is estimated to have contributed 73,441 residents while domestic migration resulted in a loss of 38,834 residents, netting 34,607 new residents. In 2016, one third of the County’s population was born outside of the U.S.

Montgomery County’s trend toward racial and ethnic diversification mirrors national demographic trends. Since 1990, the County’s White, non-Hispanic population has decreased by two percent while the African American population increased by 75 percent, the Asian population increased by 118 percent, and the Hispanic population (of any race) increased by 197 percent. 2010 was the first year that racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic Whites accounted for the majority of the County’s population.

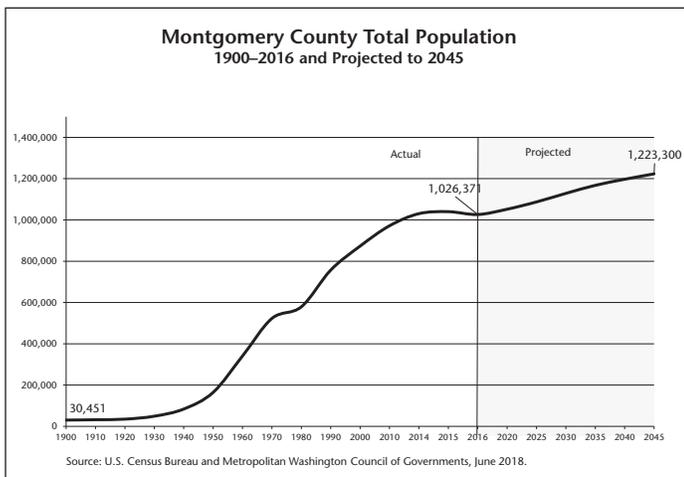
Economy

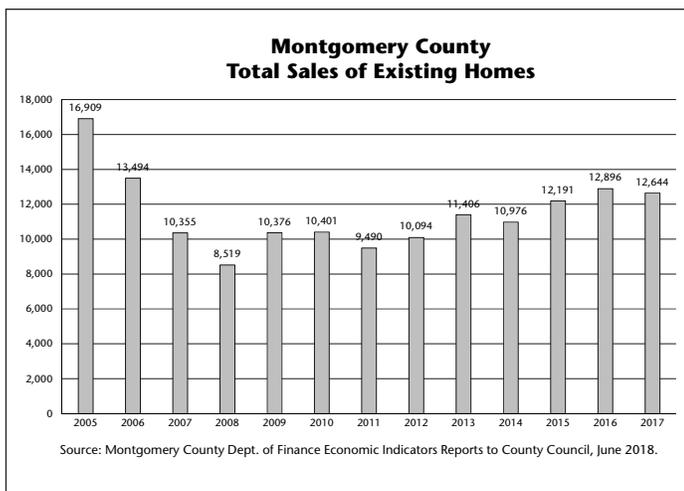
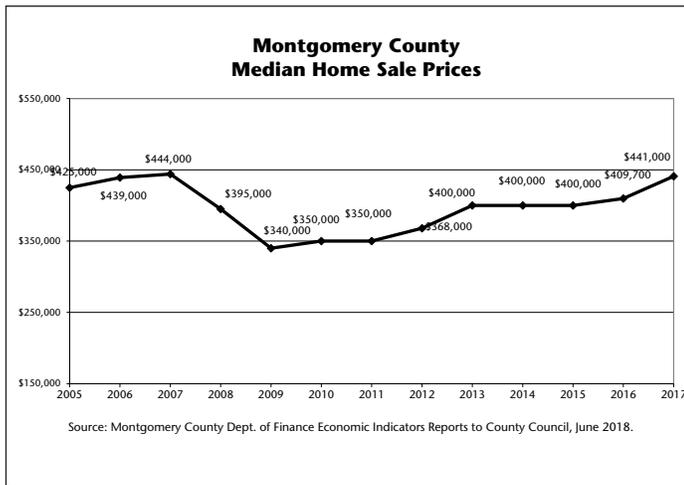
The major economic event of the past ten years is commonly known as the “Great Recession.” This deep recession officially lasted nearly two years, beginning in December 2007 and ending in June 2009. Even after the official end of the recession the economy remained weak and job growth was slow for several more years. Compared to other parts of the nation, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Montgomery County fared reasonably well during and after the recession. Whereas national unemployment peaked at 10 percent in October of 2009, the County’s peak unemployment was six percent in January of 2010. By December 2015, the national unemployment rate dropped to five percent and Montgomery County’s rate to 3.4 percent.

The recession’s impact and recovery also is evident in the County housing market. The weakest year for new residential starts was 2009, when 966 units began construction. In 2017, there were an estimated 1,637 building permits for new housing. In the resale market, the weakest year was 2008, when 8,519 existing homes were sold. By 2017, 12,644 existing homes were sold. Along with increased activity in both housing sectors have come rising prices. The median sales price of existing homes experienced a bubble that reached \$444,000 in 2007. That figure dropped to \$340,000 in 2009, but sales prices have gradually risen since the start of the recession, and stood at \$441,000 in 2017.

The recession’s long-lasting impacts on school system enrollment include the following:

- First, households that experienced job losses in other parts of the country moved to Montgomery County for better job prospects or to share housing with those who live here, putting pressure on MCPS enrollment.





- Second, because of reduced opportunities for employment outside the County, there was less out-migration than is typical. Out-migration has moderated enrollment increases in the past by offsetting in-migration. During the recession, net migration to the County increased, raising MCPS enrollment levels.
- Third, decreases in the value of County housing placed many homeowners “under water” in mortgage debt. Consequently, households who might have moved were forced to stay put. This, too, resulted in less out-migration than in-migration.
- Fourth, many families that previously enrolled their children in private schools were forced to rethink this financial expense. There was a marked increase in students enrolling in MCPS from area private schools.

Master Plans & Housing

Traditional suburban residential development is becoming the exception in the County. Subdivisions in Clarksburg are among the last that will be built in the County. A new school cluster was formed there in 2006, when Clarksburg High School opened to accommodate these new communities.

In the past, County development has been characterized by a separation of residential and commercial uses. Today, a desire to mix land uses and concentrate denser development

in transit accessible hubs is guiding new master and sector plans. In addition, reduced availability of land for residential development has spurred infill and redevelopment of older housing and/or other structures. Higher housing densities than seen in the past will characterize the future housing stock and accommodate our growing population. Overall, today’s land use planning promotes the urbanization of transportation corridors.

Recently adopted master and sector plans include those for the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro station area and Downtown Bethesda. In 2016, the Montgomery Village Master Plan and Westbard Sector Plan were adopted. These plans provide for the development of new mid-rise and high-rise multi-family housing, which are expected to contribute additional students to the school system. MCPS participates in county and city land use planning to ensure impacts on enrollment are considered and future school sites are identified. (See Appendix P-1 for further information on the role of MCPS in land use planning.) Moreover, MCPS monitors housing activity in all school service areas through close coordination with the Montgomery County Planning Department, and comparable plan review departments in the cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville. Housing plans are factored into school enrollment projections according to building schedules provided by developers. In addition, MCPS collaborates with county agencies to measure the student yield of different types of housing once it is built.

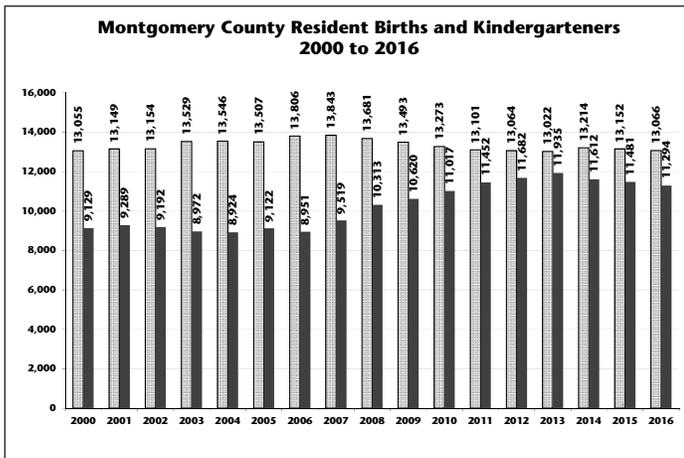
Subdivision Staging Policy

The Montgomery County Subdivision Staging Policy is the tool the county uses to regulate subdivision approvals, ensuring they are commensurate with the availability of adequate transportation and school facilities. The policy includes an annual test of school adequacy that compares projected school enrollment to school capacity at the elementary, middle, and high school level in the 25 MCPS school clusters, as well as at each individual school. The school test takes into account capital projects scheduled within the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) timeframe.

Results of the FY 2019 school test are available in the detailed tables in Appendix D. Additional information on the role of MCPS with respect to the Subdivision Staging Policy can be found in Appendix C-1. The FY 2019 school test that will become effective July 1, 2018 is based on the enrollment projections in this document and capital projects approved by the County Council in May 2018.

Student Population Trends

Resident births, the aging of the student population, and migration all affect student enrollment trends. Any given year’s resident births translate into MCPS’s incoming Kindergarten class five years later. While birth rates have held relatively steady over time, they declined by one to two percent each year during the onset of the 2008 recession. Meanwhile, Kindergarten enrollments as a share of births grew during the recession years, and have yet to show a declining trend despite economic recovery. Since 2000, there have been an



average of just over 13,000 births annually, and an average of just over 10,000 Kindergarteners annually. Over the same period, Kindergarten class enrollees as a percentage of annual county resident births has ranged from 70 to 87 percent, with the highest percentage occurring in 2013. In 2016, the Kindergarten class represented 86% of 2011 county resident births.

The movement up through the grades by students, termed the “aging of the student population,” is the second driver of enrollment change. When the size of the kindergarten class is larger than that of Grade 12, then there is a natural increase in total enrollment from one year to the next, or a kind of bubble in enrollment. During the 2016–2017 school year, there was a difference between the two grades of 247 students.

Therefore, in the 2017–2018 school year, a small portion of the one-year increase in enrollment of 2,536 students was caused by existing students aging up, as Grade 12 students exiting the system were replaced by a larger group of kindergarten students entering it. During the next six years, kindergarten cohorts are projected to decrease relative to Grade 12 cohorts, which will eliminate this source of enrollment growth.

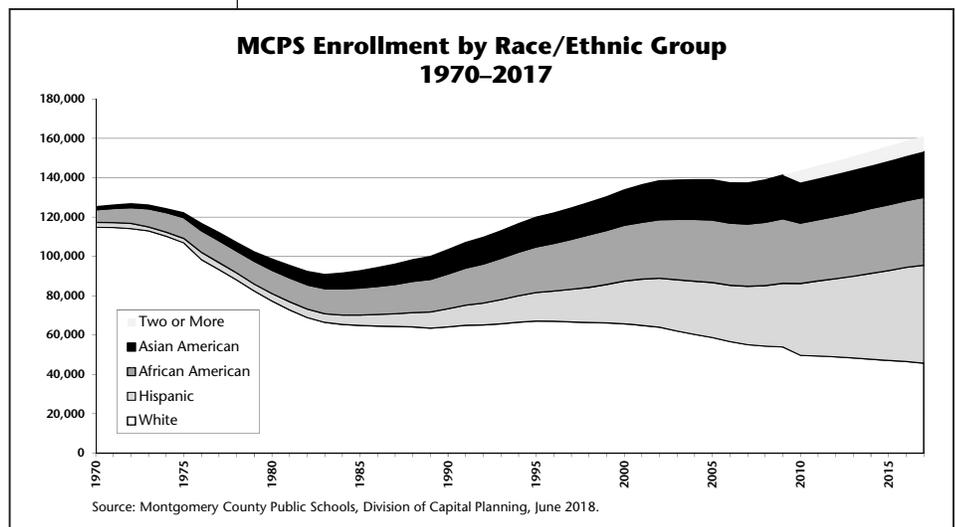
Migration, the third driver of enrollment change, can significantly fluctuate with economic conditions and international events, each of which can be volatile and difficult to predict. Records of MCPS student entries and withdrawals show that typically 12,000 to 13,000 new students enter the system each year, while some number of students exit the system each year. In the past decade, migration-related entries into MCPS have greatly exceeded withdrawals, resulting in annual net increases in enrollment. Between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years, in-migration added nearly 2,950 students from outside the system.

Student Diversity

Records of county resident births show a levelling off in the numbers of births in each race/ethnic group. This is in contrast to large declines, from 1990 to 2010, in the number of White, non-Hispanic births and large increases in births of other race/ethnic groups. In the past few years, White, non-Hispanic births have levelled off at about 4,800 per year, African American births at 2,800 per year, Asian births at 2,000 per year and Hispanic births at 3,500 per year. However, it is not known if the recent trends in each race/ethnic group will continue. It is known that the median age for the Hispanic, Asian, and African American population is lower than for the White, non-Hispanic population, and that household size for these groups exceeds that of White, non-Hispanic households. As these characteristics persist, increasing student diversity will continue, with Hispanic enrollment exceeding that of other groups.

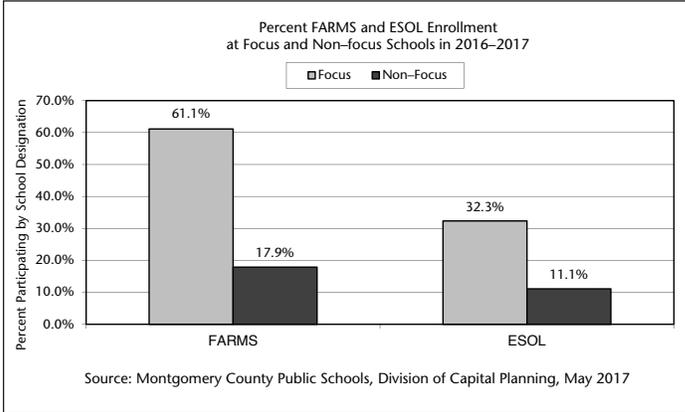
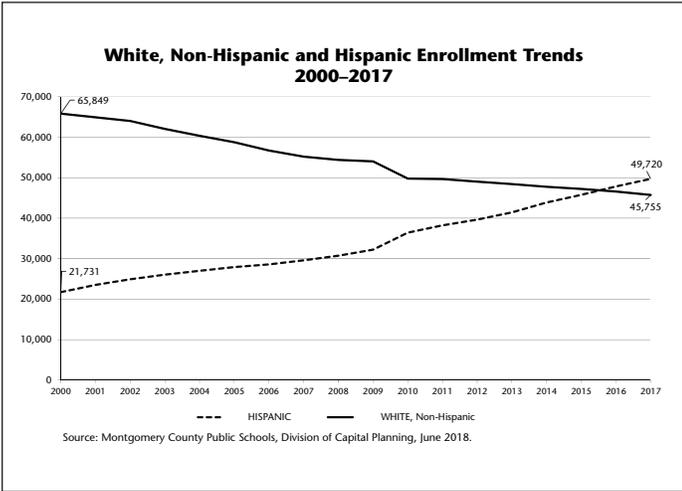
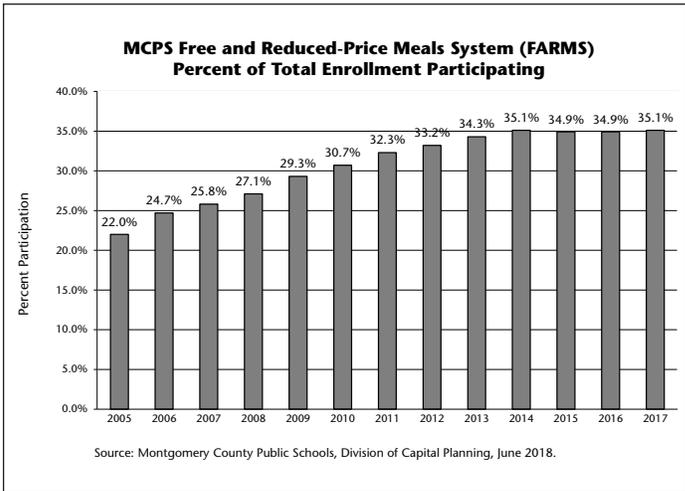
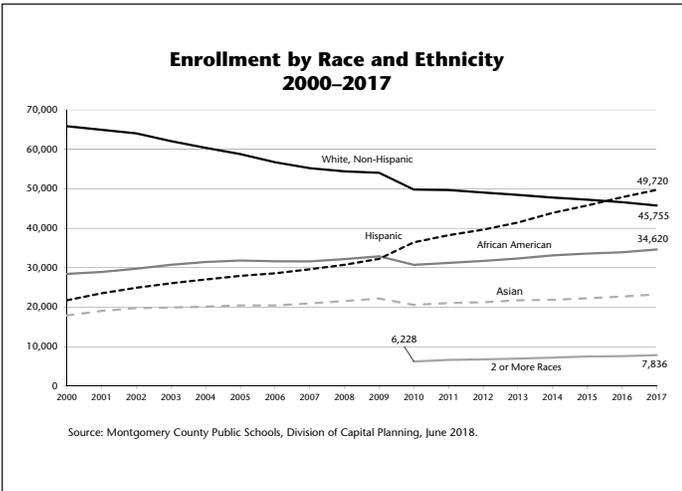
Total enrollment for the 2017–2018 school year is 161,546 students. Of total enrollment, 22 percent of students are now African American, 14 percent are Asian, 31 percent are Hispanic, 28 are percent White, non-Hispanic, and less than five percent are two or more races, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan Native.

The accompanying chart illustrates the trend of increasing student diversity since 1970, when the student population was 92 percent White, non-Hispanic. Today, there is no longer a majority racial/ethnic group.



Also shown are enrollments in the four major racial and ethnic groups over the past decade. Not shown in the charts is enrollment in the “two or more races” category, just recently established in 2010. However, it can be seen that the addition of this category resulted in a dip in enrollment in 2010 in White, non-Hispanic, African American, and Asian students, as some identified with the “two or more races” category. (See Appendices A-3 and A-4 for trends in enrollment by race and ethnic group.)

Student participation in the federal Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) Program is the school system’s primary



measure of student socioeconomic levels. In the 2017–2018 school year, 35.1 percent of students participated in the FARMS Program. Participation has been rising over the past several years. In 2005, 22.0 percent of students participated in the program. By 2015, 34.9 percent of students participated, an increase of 23,822 students.

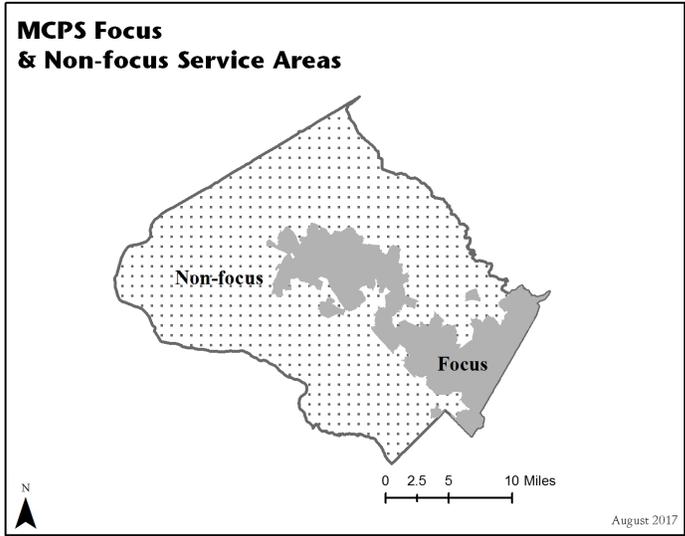
Student enrollment in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program is a measure of student ethnic and language diversity. In the current school year, 17.5 percent of students receive ESOL services. As the school system has diversified over time, this percentage has grown. In 2005, 9.7 percent of students were in the ESOL Program and by 2015, this share had grown to 14.4 percent. ESOL students represent 156 countries of origin and speak an estimated 132 different languages. Although immigration to the United States has been steady for many years and does contribute program participants, the share of ESOL students born in the United States has been increasing. U.S.-born students make up approximately 65 percent of ESOL enrollment.

Focus and Non-focus Elementary Schools

There are currently 70 focus elementary schools (including upper schools in the case of paired schools) and 63 non-focus

elementary schools. Schools in these areas have reduced class-sizes in Grades K–2 in order to address student needs and prepare the students for success in later grade levels. The 2017 demographic composition of focus and non-focus schools is compared in the accompanying charts.

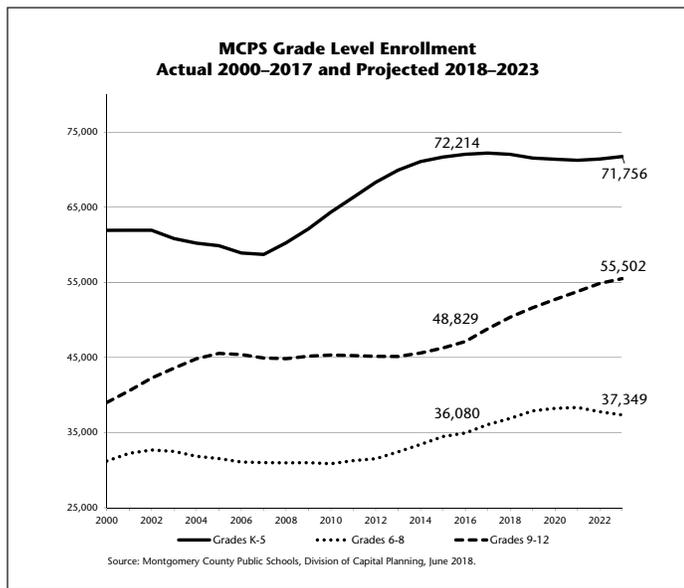
At one time, focus elementary school service areas had little racial and ethnic diversity. The wave of immigration over the past three decades has transformed these communities and the greatest concentration of student diversity and participation in the FARMS and ESOL programs is now found in areas of



the county where two conditions exist—major transportation corridors are present and affordable housing is available. In Silver Spring and Wheaton these conditions are found in communities bordering New Hampshire Avenue, Georgia Avenue, and Columbia Pike. In Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown, these conditions are found in communities bordering I-270 and Route 355. These relatively affordable areas are characterized by apartment communities dating from the 1980s and earlier, as well as neighborhoods with older townhouses and single-family detached homes. Some of these homes may be occupied by two or more families who share housing costs. In these communities, enrollment growth has been driven by turnover of existing housing units.

MCPS Enrollment Forecast

The school enrollment forecasts are based on county births, aging of the current student population, and migration patterns. As county births increased through 2007, more kindergarten students entered MCPS. The advent of full-day kindergarten, countywide since 2006 also has been a factor in kindergarten enrollment increases. Due to large elementary enrollment increases decade, MCPS is now experiencing a period of growth at secondary schools. (See appendices A and B for enrollment projections by grade level and Appendix P-2 for a description of the MCPS enrollment forecasting methodology.)



Summary

The last major period of enrollment increases at MCPS occurred during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, when children from the Baby Boom era, born between 1946 and 1964, enrolled in schools. Enrollment from this wave of growth peaked in 1972, at 126,912 students. Thereafter, the so-called Baby Bust era saw births decline and MCPS enrollment decrease to a low of 91,030 students in 1983. Since 1983, a much greater “baby boom” has occurred in the county. During the official Baby Boom years, the highest birth year in Montgomery County was 1963 when there were 8,461 resident births. The

current baby boom in the county significantly surpasses this figure with births above 13,000 in recent years. Contributing to enrollment increases is the movement of households into the county from other parts of the world and the reduction in out-migration of households in recent years.

Keeping pace with enrollment growth, implementing full-day kindergarten at all elementary schools, and accommodating class-size reductions at focus elementary schools have required a major investment in school facilities. In the 2017–2018 school year, MCPS operates 133 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, one career and technology high school, one alternative program, and five special program centers. Since 1983, MCPS has opened 34 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, and 6 high schools. During the next six years, additional school capacity will be added through new school openings, major capital projects, and classroom additions.

Competing with the need for school capacity projects is the need to preserve our investment in school facilities. Consequently, the school system places a great emphasis on county-wide projects to regularly upgrade building systems in aging facilities. Funding for projects such as Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) and Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR) is important for extending the life-cycle of our schools. The facility plans and capital projects described in this document enable MCPS to add school capacity, systematically improve older schools, and maintain all schools in good condition.

