

# 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”, 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 had been particularly strong until the COVID-19 health pandemic. In March 2020, MCPS, similar to many school systems around the country, switched from in-person learning, to virtually learning. Nationwide, school systems experienced lower enrollments in the 2020–2021 school year, particularly in the lower grades, as homeschooling and private schools with in-person instruction gained enrollment.

Official September 30th student enrollment was 160,223 for the 2023–2024 school year, a decrease of 331 students from the 2022–2023 school year. Enrollment grew by 8,934 students from the 2013–2014 to the 2023–2024 school year. Total school system enrollment is projected to increase to 167,543 students by the 2029–2030 school year. This represents a slowdown in growth, due to the continued decline in resident births, resulting in lower kindergarten classes, and the ripple effect as they progress through the system each year, as well as the anomalous 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school year student enrollments due to the COVID-19 health pandemic.

### Community Trends

#### Population

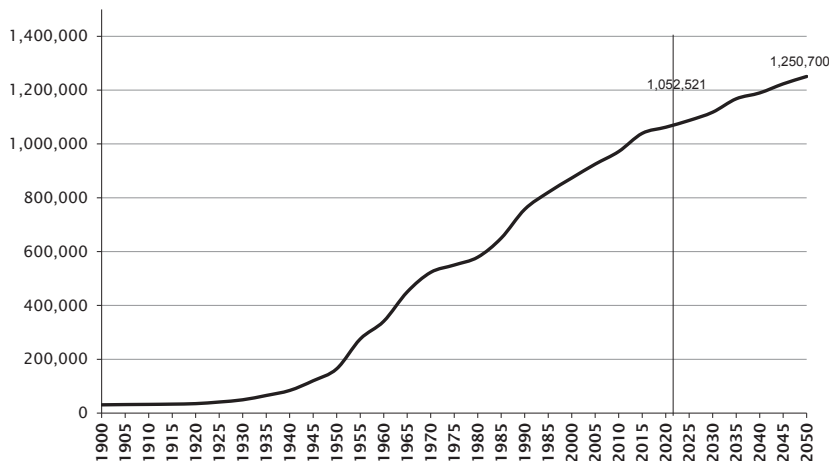
Montgomery County’s overall population is growing and diversifying. According to U.S. Census Bureau, the county’s total population has increased by 185,133 people, or 21.2 percent

since 2000 from 873,341 to 1,058,474 people (2023). A significant share of the county’s population increase has resulted from resident live births outnumbering deaths by more than two to one. Between 2000 and 2021 (the last year of available data), there have been 286,854 births compared to 128,154 deaths in the county, for a net natural population increase of 158,700 residents, accounting for 86.9 percent of the county’s overall population increase (Maryland Department of Health, 2021).

Migration patterns also are contributing to population growth. Between 2003 and 2022, international migration has been estimated to contribute 158,895 residents while domestic migration resulted in a loss of 154,554 residents, netting 4,341 new residents (Maryland Department of Planning). The 2023 estimate of county residents born outside of the United States is approximately 346,121 (U.S. Census Bureau) or approximately one-third of the county’s population.

Montgomery County’s trend toward racial and ethnic diversification mirrors national demographic trends. According to U.S. Census Bureau data and Montgomery County Planning, between 2000 and 2023, the county’s White, non-Hispanic population decreased as a percentage of the total population by 23.4 percent to 41.4 percent. The African American population increased by 5.7 percent to 20.7 percent. The Asian population increased by 4.9 percent to 16.2 percent, and the Hispanic population (of any race) increased by 8.8 percent to 20.3 percent. Other categories, such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Alaskan Native and Two or More have a combined increase to 4.7 percent. The U.S. Census Bureau introduced the Two or More category in 2010. Also in 2010, the county measured its first year that racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic Whites accounted for the majority of the county’s population.

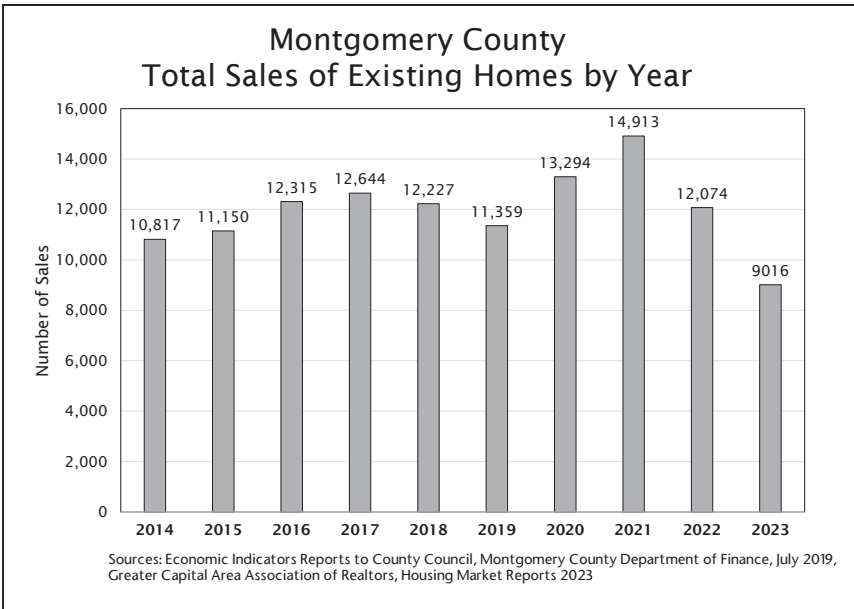
Montgomery County Total Population  
1900–2022 and Projected to 2050



Source: Montgomery County Public Schools, U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Cooperative Forecast Round 10.0, Division of Capital Planning and Real Estate, June 2024.

#### Economy

Prior to the COVID-19 health pandemic, the unemployment rate in Montgomery County as of December 2019 was 2.4 percent, which was lower than the national unemployment rate of 3.5 percent. The national unemployment rate increased to 14.7 percent as of April 2020, as the COVID-19 health pandemic caused many businesses to shut down. The county unemployment rate in peaked in May 2020 at 9.8 percent, but has since declined to 2.3 percent as of January 2024 (Economic Indicator; Montgomery County Department of Finance, April 2020; Maryland Department of Labor; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).



The county housing market has grown nearly continuously for years. In FY 2010, there were 1,056 new residential starts. By FY 2016, residential starts peaked at 5,230 units, and in FY 2019, after two years of lower starts, there were 5,429 units. The recent decline in units is mostly due to fewer multi-family units constructed. During the past 10 fiscal years, sales of existing homes grew from a low of 10,255 in 2013 to a peak of 12,644 in 2017, and another peak in 2021 of 14,913. The median sales price of housing was \$572,000 in 2023, according to the Greater Capital Area Association of Realtors.

## Master Plans & Housing

Traditional suburban residential development is becoming the exception in the county. Subdivisions in the Clarksburg area are among the last greenfield developments to be constructed in the county. A new school cluster formed in Clarksburg in 2006, when Clarksburg High School opened to accommodate these new communities.

In the past, county development characterized by a separation of residential and commercial uses was typical. 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 along transportation corridors.

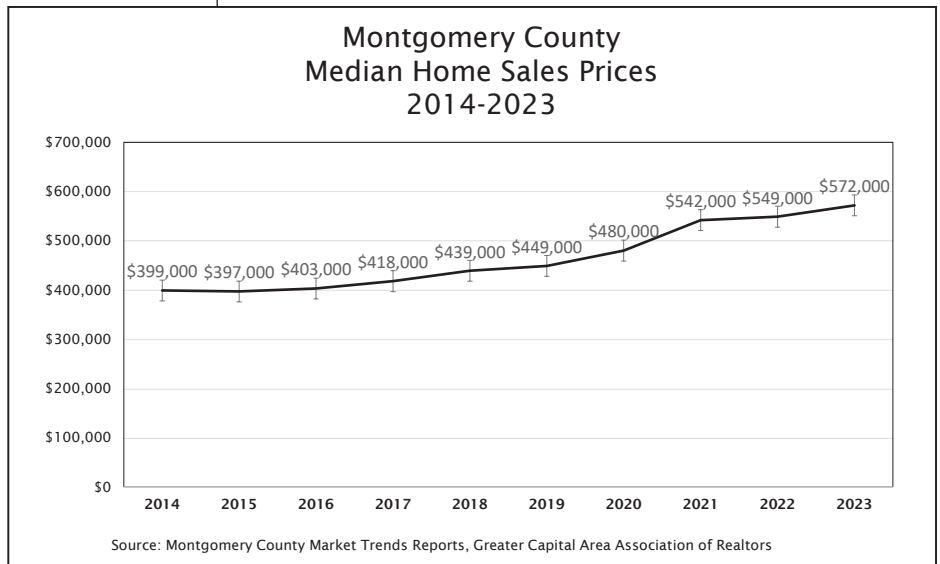
On April 2, 2024, the County Council adopted the Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment. Other recently adopted master and sector plans include those for

Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro Station area, and Bethesda Downtown. In 2017, there were two adopted plans: the Forest Glen/Montgomery Hills (FG/MH) Sector Plan, and the Greater Lyttonsville Sector Plan. The FG/MH plan provides for increased residential density near existing transit stations through rezoning, with the intent to prioritize affordable Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs). The Lyttonsville plan provides for increased residential density near the Lyttonsville Purple Line Station as well as potential redevelopment of Paddington Square. Evaluations on the net effect of students on the school system occurs after development plan approval.

MCPS participates in county and city land use planning to ensure impacts on enrollment are considered and future school sites identified. (See Appendix C 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. In addition, MCPS collaborates with county agencies to measure the student yield of different types of housing.

## County Growth and Infrastructure Policy

The County Growth and Infrastructure Policy (GIP) 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 levels 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.



Additional information on the role of MCPS with respect to the County Growth and Infrastructure is in Appendix C. The FY 2025 school test, based on the enrollment projections and capital projects included in the adopted FY 2025–2030 CIP, will go into effect July 1, 2024. For results of the FY 2025 school test see Appendix D.

## Student Population Trends

The main contributing factors influencing student population include resident live births, the aging of the student population, and migration patterns. A percentage of the babies born to Montgomery County residents in one year show up in MCPS incoming kindergarten classes five years later. This is commonly referred to as a kindergarten capture rate. In both 2000 and 2016, birth figures were just over 13,000, growing, peaking in 2007 at 13,843, and then declining. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, total births were less than 13,000 at 12,634, 12,373, and 12,019, respectively. Births in 2021, the last year available, dropped below 12,000, totaling 11,505 for Montgomery County, continuing the downward trend.

In the 2000–2001 school year, the kindergarten capture rate was 73.9 percent. By the 2006–2007 school year, the rate decreased to 68.1 percent, and had since increased to 87.2 percent for the 2019–2020 school year. The increases were likely due to economic factors as well as changes to all-day kindergarten programs. The 2020–2021 school year kindergarten enrollment was 78.7 percent and considered an anomaly due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. Kindergarten enrollment increased to 83.7 percent in the 2023–2024 school year. Future kindergarten classes will most likely return to approximately 87.0 percent of births five years earlier.

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 different from that of Grade 12, then there is a natural change in total enrollment from one year to the next. The Grade 12 total for the 2022–2023 school year was 11,866, and the kindergarten class for the 2023–2024 school year is 10,353, or a difference between the two grades of 1,513 students. Without other factors, enrollment would naturally decline, however, students migrate into the system at all grade levels from other districts or from international locations, which have more than made up the difference. For example, there is traditionally an increase of students enrolled in ninth grade over the previous eighth grade. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this increase averaged approximately 2,000 additional students. In the past two years, that number has averaged roughly 2,660 students.

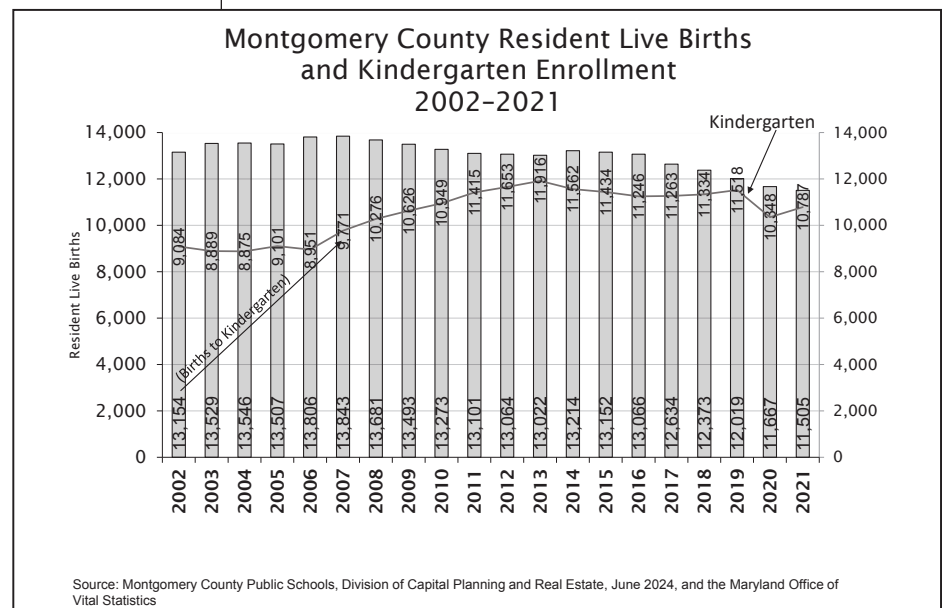
Migration, the third driver of enrollment change, can significantly fluctuate with economic conditions and international events, each of which can be volatile and

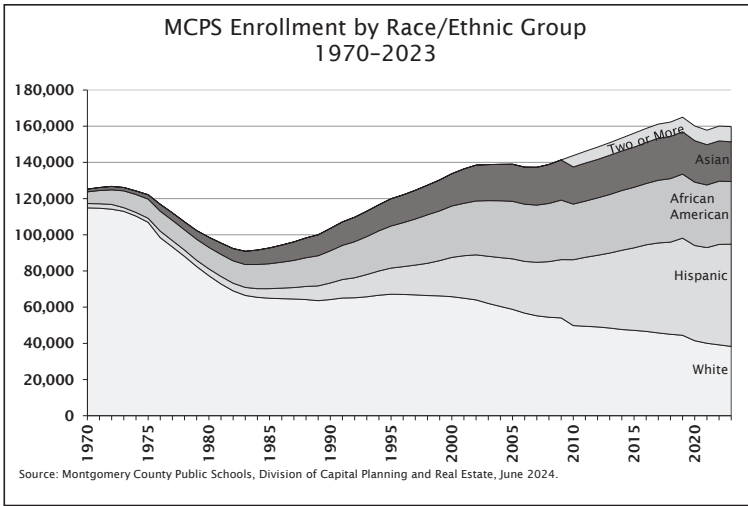
difficult to predict. Records of MCPS student entries and withdrawals show that there has been a decrease in the immigration from approximately 12,328 new students from other public school districts in Maryland and throughout the United States, private schools, homeschooling, and from out of the country, in the 2010–2011 school year, to 10,623 in the 2022–2023 school year. Withdrawals over the same time increased from 10,186 in the 2010–2011 school year to 10,833 in the 2022–2023 school year. There were 210 more students withdrawing to attend other public, private, foreign, or home schools than entering the system in the 2022–2023 school year. More students withdrew to attend private schools or chose homeschooling during the COVID-19 health pandemic. Students began to return, as expected, to the system during the 2021–2022 school year, and during the 2022–2023 school year, 449 students were withdrawn for home schooling vs 418 students who entered from home schooling.

## Student Diversity

Records of county resident live births show a levelling off in the numbers of births in each racial/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 live births of other race/ethnic groups. In 2021, White, non-Hispanic births were 3,758, African American births were 2,353, Asian births were 1,521, and Hispanic births were 3,576. The general fertility rate for Hispanic women between the ages 15 and 44 is 78.8 (per 1,000) versus 53.6 for African American women, 45.6 for Asian or Pacific Islander, and 51.0 for non-Hispanic White women in the same age range (Vital Statistics, Maryland Department of Health).

Official enrollment for September 30, 2023, was 160,223 students. Of the total enrollment, 21.6 percent of students were African American, 13.7 percent were Asian, 35.3 percent were Hispanic, and 23.9 percent were White, non-Hispanic, and 5.3 percent were Two or More Races. The categories of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan



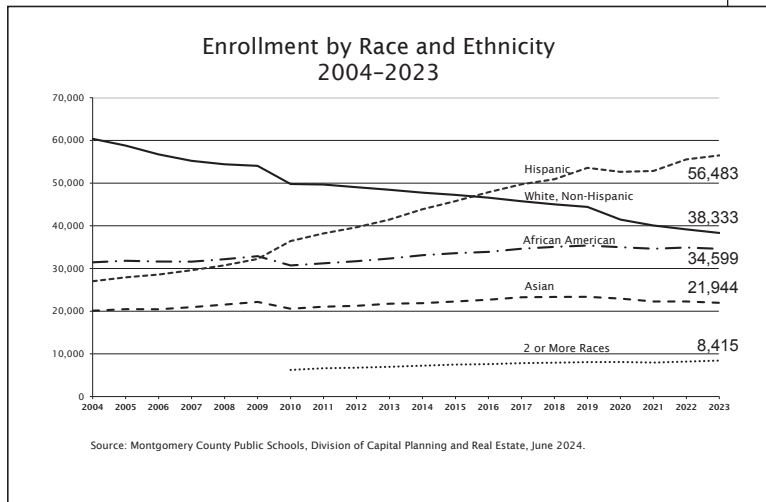


Native are each less than five percent of the total enrollment. The accompanying chart illustrates the trend of increasing student diversity since 1970, when the student population was 92 percent White, non-Hispanic. Today, there is no longer a majority racial/ethnic group.

Also shown are enrollments in the four major racial and ethnic groups over the past two decades. It can be seen that the addition of a new 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 2023–2024 school year, 43.1 percent of students participated in the FARMS Program. There has been an increase of 15,416 students participating in FARMS during the past 10 school years (2014–2015 to 2023–2024).

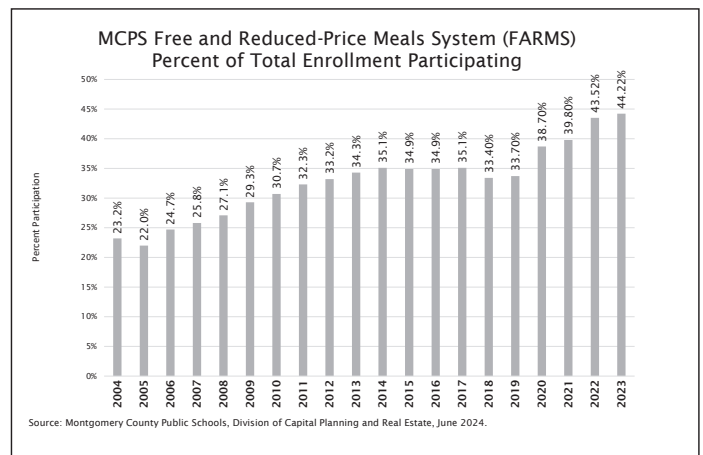
Student enrollment in the English Language Development (ELD) program is an indicator of student language diversity. As the school system has diversified over time, this percentage has grown. During the 2014–2015 school year, 13.4 percent of students were in the ELD (previously known as ESOL) Program,



and that has grown to 20.6 percent for the 2023–2024 school year. Emergent multilingual learners (EML) students in ELD represent approximately 150 countries of origin and speak an estimated 160 different languages. Although immigration to the United States has been increasing for many years and does contribute program participants, a large proportion of EML students were born in the United States.

## Class Size Reduction and Non Class Size Reduction Elementary Schools

For the 2023–2024 school year, there were 69 Class Size Reduction (CSR) elementary schools (including upper schools in the case of paired schools). Class Size Reduction schools include both Title 1 and Focus schools and have reduced class-sizes in order to address student needs and prepare



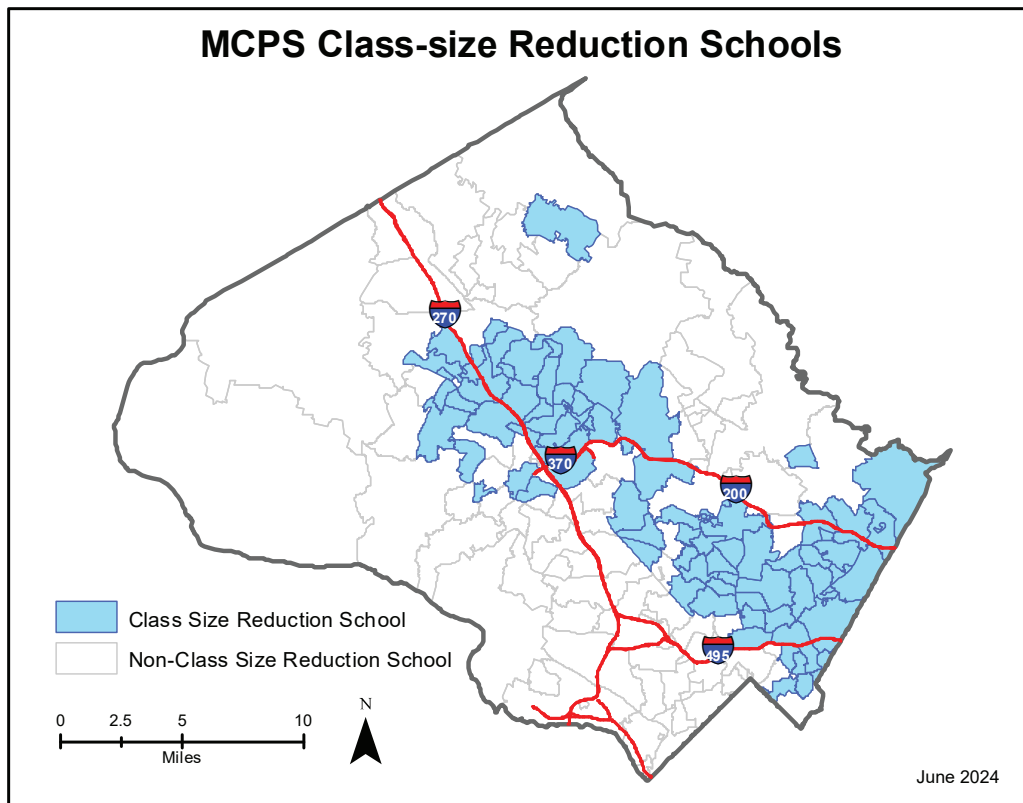
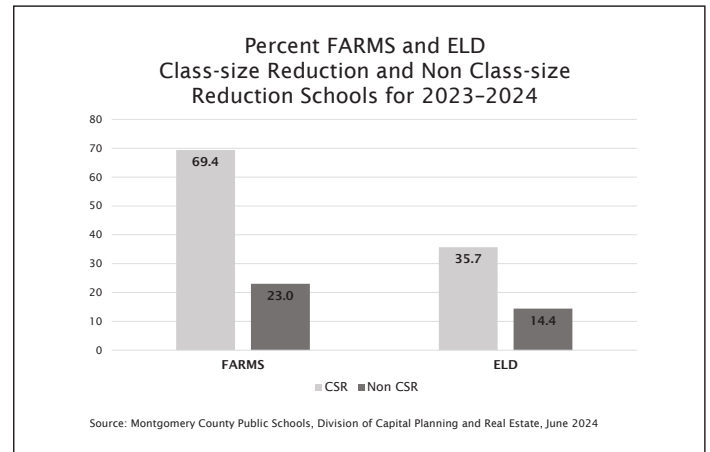
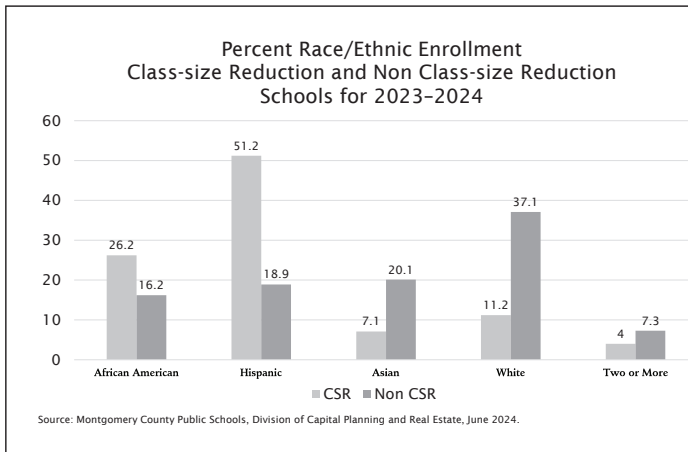
the students for success in later grade levels. The 2023–2024 demographic composition of CSR and Non CSR schools is compared in the accompanying chart.

At one time, CSR elementary school service areas had little racial and ethnic diversity. The wave of in-migration over the past three decades has transformed these communities and the greatest concentration of student diversity and participation in the FARMS and ELD 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 mainly on county births, aging of the current student population, and migration patterns. As county births increased through 2007, more kindergarten students entered MCPS. The 2020–2021 kindergarten class was unusually low due to the COVID-19 health pandemic, and therefore considered anomalous. The 2021–2022 kindergarten class was larger than the 2020–2021 school year, but was still smaller than it was between the 2010–2011 and 2019–2020 school years. The 2023–2024 kindergarten class is lower than 2022–2023. The capture rate (the percentage of resident births five years earlier to kindergarten enrollment) is 83.7 percent.

It is anticipated that there will be a return to 87 percent kindergarten capture. However, the decline in resident births will result in a decline in the kindergarten population that in turn will slow the growth of the total enrollment as students age from grade to grade. In addition, the unusually small kindergarten class of the 2020–2021 school year resulted in a smaller than anticipated 1st grade class in the 2022–2023 school year that may to some extent keep enrollment lower through the elementary years during the planning period. (See appendices A and B for enrollment projections by grade level and Appendix C-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 the 5-year resident births averaging approximately 12,040. The factors most contributing to enrollment increases are higher kindergarten capture rates and migration patterns.

Keeping pace with enrollment growth, and accommodating class-size reductions through Title 1 and Focus elementary schools have required a major investment in school facilities. In the 2023–2024 school year, MCPS operated 137 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, 1 career and technology high school, 1 alternative program with 2 satellite locations, and 5 special program centers. Since 1983, MCPS has opened 37 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.

