

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 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. It is anticipated that many of these students will return to MCPS once in-person instruction returns; however, it may take a few years to return to the previously projected enrollments.

The enrollment this school year totaled 160,564 students, a decrease of 4,703 students from the 2019–2020 school year. Enrollment grew by 16,500 students from the 2010–2011 to the 2020–2021 school year. Total school system enrollment is projected to increase to 170,761 students by the 2026–2027 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 school year student enrollment 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 estimates, the county’s total population has increased by 177,347 people, or 20.3 percent since 2000 from 873,341 to 1,050,688 people (July 2019). A significant share of the county’s population increase has resulted from resident live births outnumbering deaths by more than two to one. Since 2000, there have been 263,682 births compared to 113,515 deaths in the county, for a net natural population increase of 150,167 residents, accounting for 84.7 percent of the county’s overall population increase.

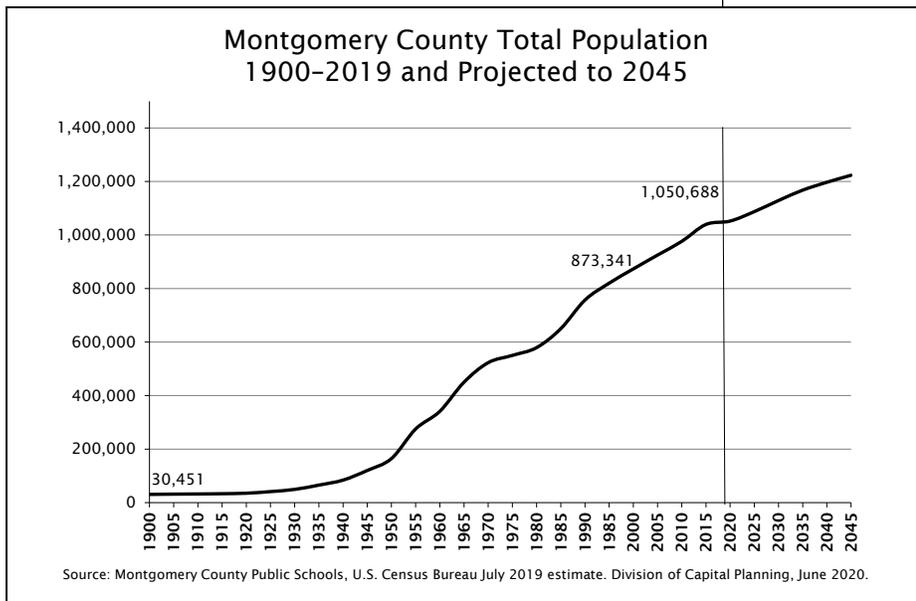
Migration patterns also are contributing to population growth. Between July 2010 and July 2019, international migration has been estimated to contribute 76,972 residents while domestic migration resulted in a loss of 47,953 residents, netting 29,019 new residents (Maryland Department of Planning). The July 2019 estimate of county residents born outside of the United States is approximately 339,400 (U.S. Census Bureau) or approximately one-third of the county’s population.

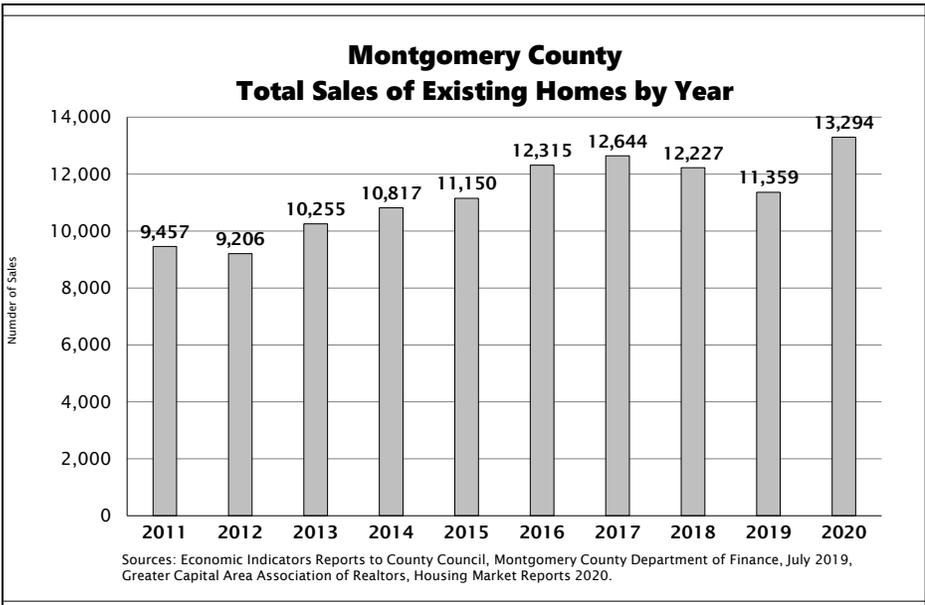
Montgomery County’s trend toward racial and ethnic diversification mirrors national demographic trends. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, between 2000 and 2018, the county’s White, non-Hispanic population decreased as a percentage of the total population by 16.5 percent to 43.0 percent, while the African American population increased by 3.3 percent, the Asian population increased by 3.2 percent, and the Hispanic population (of any race) increased by 8.4 percent to 19.9 percent. Other categories, such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Alaskan Native and

Two or More have a combined increase to 4.6 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.

Economy

It has been more than 10 years since the end of the “Great Recession,” which 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





- 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 in the county, which put 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 instead remained. 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.

reasonably well during and after the recession. Whereas national unemployment peaked at approximately 10 percent in 2009, the county’s peak unemployment was 5.7 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. By FY 2015, the national unemployment rate dropped to 5.7 percent and Montgomery County’s rate to 4.2 percent. The unemployment rate has continued to decline in the county and as of December 2019 was 2.4 percent, which was lower than the national unemployment rate of 3.5 percent. The national unemployment rate has since increased to 14.7 percent as of April 2020, as the COVID-19 health pandemic has caused many businesses to shut down during the pandemic. The county unemployment rate as of August 2020 rose to 8.2 percent. (Economic Indicator; Montgomery County Department of Finance, April 2020; Maryland Department of Labor; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

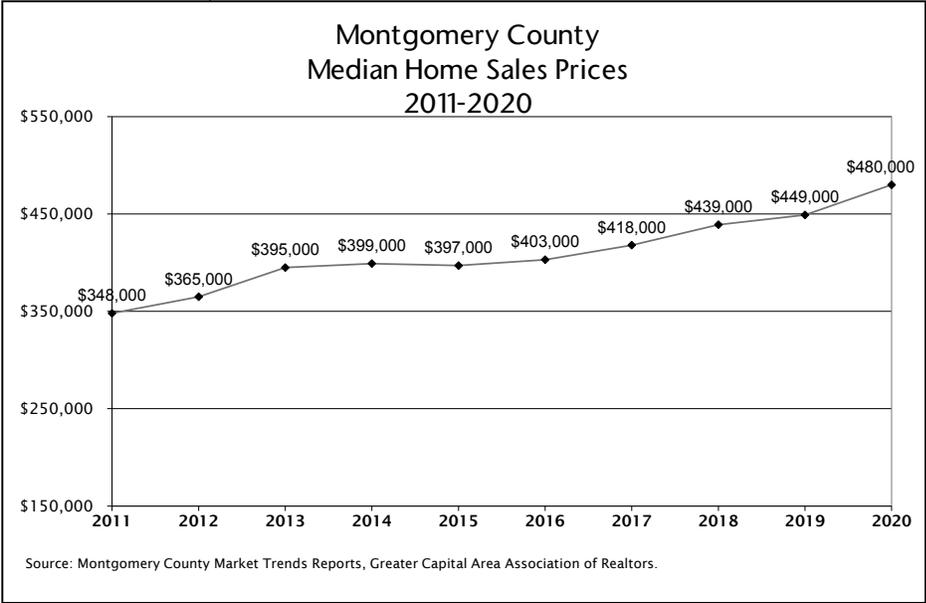
The Great Recession’s impact and recovery also is evident in the county housing market. In FY 2010, there were 1,056 new residential starts. By FY 2016, residential starts peaked at 5,230 units, and in FY 2019, after two years of lower starts, there were 5,429 units. The recent decline in units was mostly due to fewer multi-family units constructed. During the past 10 fiscal years, the weakest year was FY 2012, in the resale market when 9,206 existing homes sold. In FY 2019, 11,359 existing homes sold, continuing a decline since the peak in FY 2017 of 12,644. Prior to the recession, the median sales price of housing experienced a bubble that reached \$444,000 in 2007. That figure dropped to \$340,000 in 2009, but sales prices have gradually risen since, and was \$450,000 as of January 2020, according to the Greater Capital Area Association of Realtors.

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

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 of transportation corridors.

Recently adopted master and sector plans include those for the 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-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. 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.

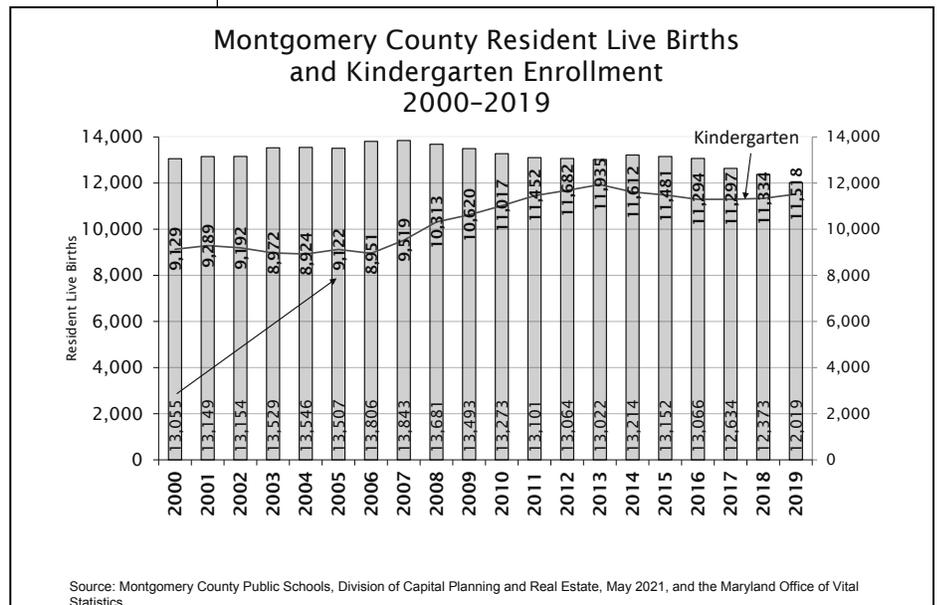
Additional information on the role of MCPS with respect to the County Growth and Infrastructure is in Appendix C-1. The FY 2022 school test based on the enrollment projections in the FY 2022 CIP and capital projects approved by the County Council in May 2021 went into effect July 1, 2021. For results of the FY 2022 school test see Appendix D.

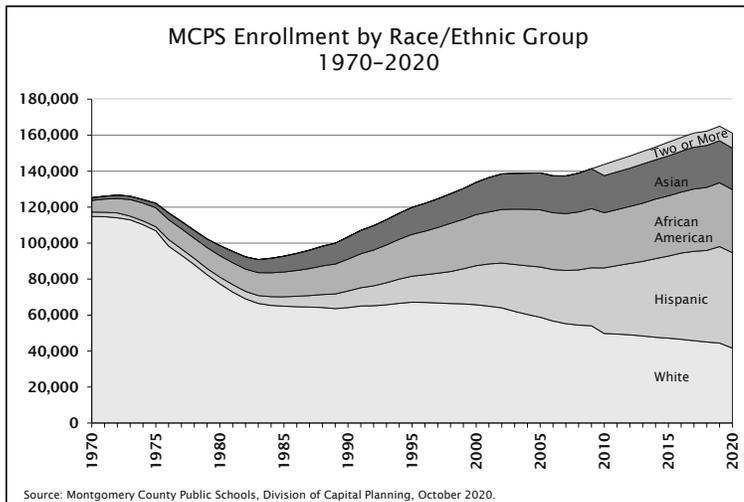
Student Population Trends

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 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 is 78.7 percent and is considered an anomaly due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. Future kindergarten classes will most likely return to approximately 87 percent of births five years earlier.

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, for Montgomery County, continuing the downward trend.

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 2019–2020 school year was 11,483, and the kindergarten class for the 2020–2021 school year was 10,348, or a difference between the two grades of 1,135 students. Therefore, in the 2020–2021 school year, 24.1 percent of the one-year decrease in enrollment of 4,703 students was caused by existing students aging up, as Grade 12 students exiting the system were replaced by a smaller group of kindergarten students entering it.

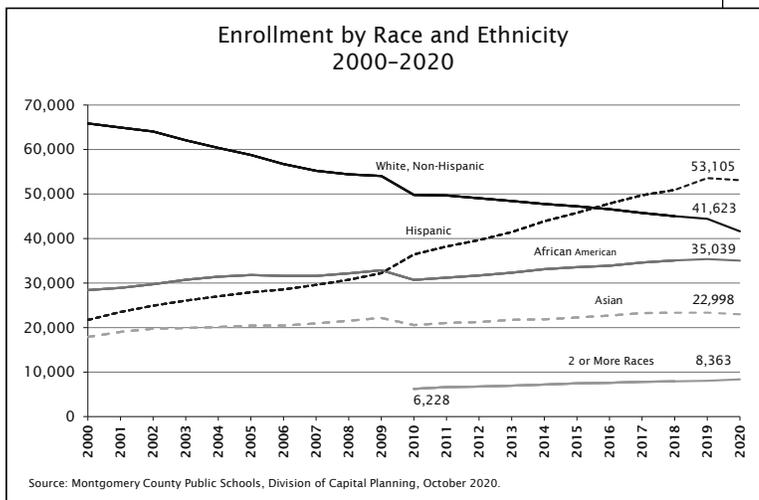




Migration, the third driver of enrollment change, can significantly fluctuate with economic conditions and international events, each of which can be volatile and difficult to predict. Records of MCPS student entries and withdrawals show that there has been an increase in the in-migration from approximately 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 12,443 in the 2019–2020 school year. Withdrawals over the same time increased from 10,186 in the 2010–2011 school year to 10,866 in the 2019–2020 school year. In the past decade, migration-related entries into MCPS have continued to exceed withdrawals, resulting in annual net increases in enrollment. The net increase from in-migration in the 2019–2020 school year was 565 fewer students, at 1,577 students from outside the system, than the net increase of 2,142 in 2010.

Student Diversity

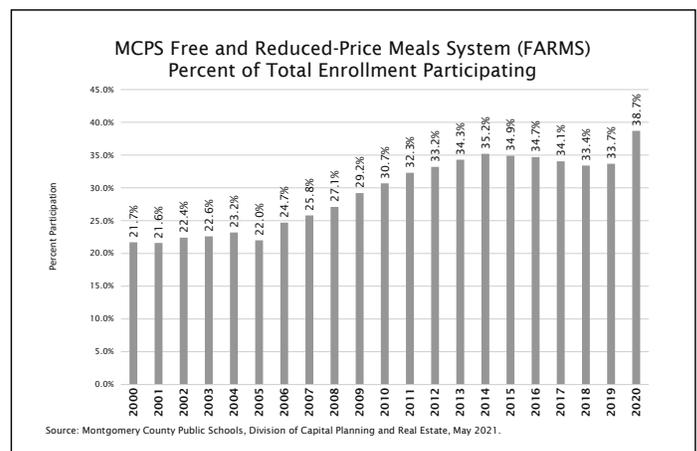
Records of county resident live births show a levelling off in the numbers of births in each racial/ethnic group. This is in contrast to large declines from 1990 to 2010, in the number of White, non-Hispanic births and large increases in live births of other race/ethnic groups. In 2019, White, non-Hispanic births were 3,999, African American births were 2,601, Asian births



were 1794 and Hispanic births were 3,549. The general fertility rate for Hispanic women between the ages 15 and 44 is 78.8 (per 1,000) versus 60.5 for African American women, and 53.2 for non-Hispanic White women in the same age range (Vital Statistics, Maryland Department of Health).

Official enrollment for September 30, 2020, is 160,564 students. Of the total enrollment, 21.8 percent of students are African American, 14.3 percent are Asian, 32.8 percent are Hispanic, and 25.8 percent are White, non-Hispanic, and 5.0 percent are Two or More Races. The categories of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native are each less than 5 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 2020–2021 school year, 38.7 percent of students participated in the FARMS Program. There has been an increase of 14,847 students participating in FARMS during the past 10 school years (2011–2012 to 2020–2021).

Student enrollment in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program is a measure of student language diversity. As the school system has diversified over time, this percentage has grown. During the 2010–2011 school year, 13.1 percent of students were in the ESOL Program, and that has grown to 15.7 percent for the 2020–2021 school year. ESOL students represent 156 countries of origin and speak an estimated 132 different languages. Although immigration to the United

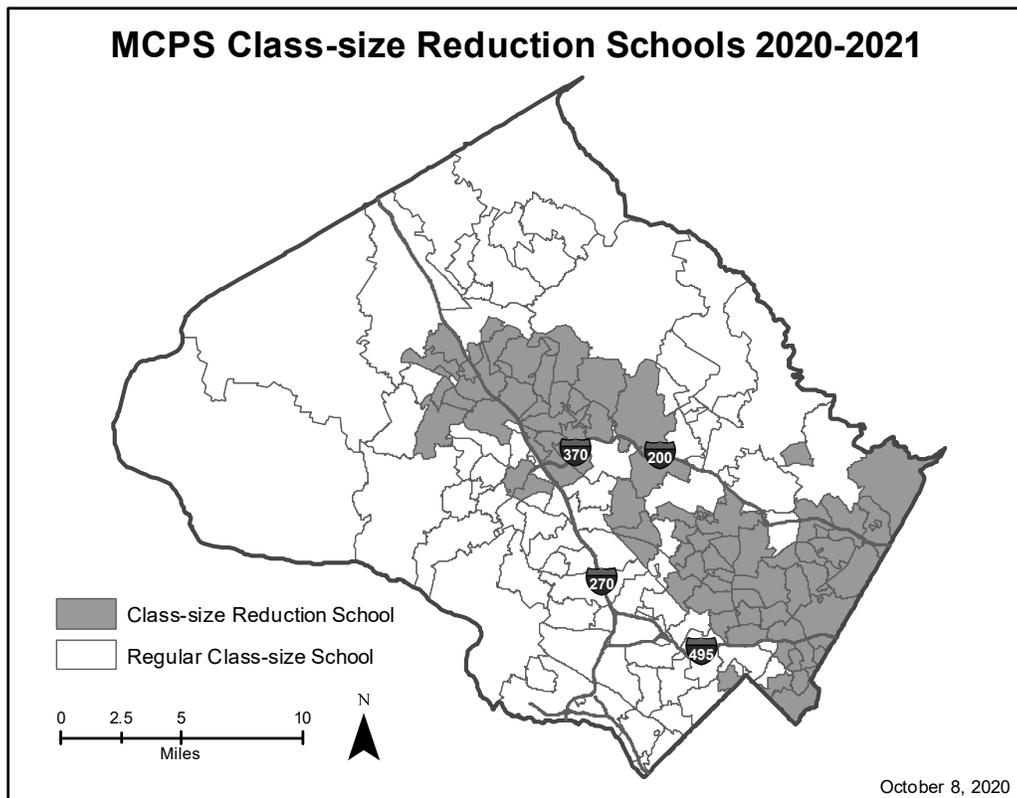
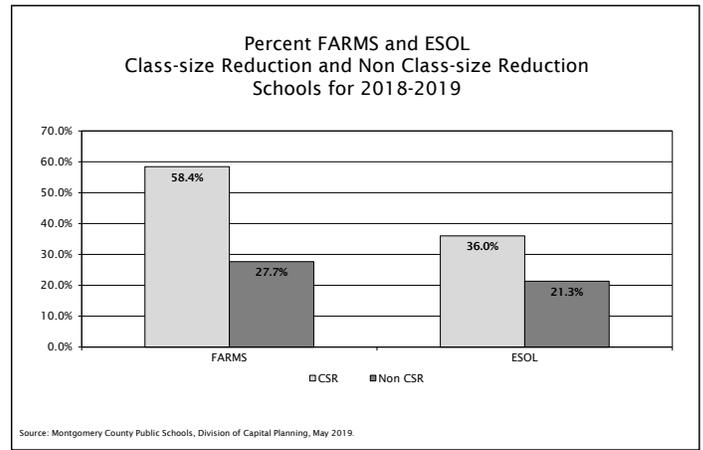
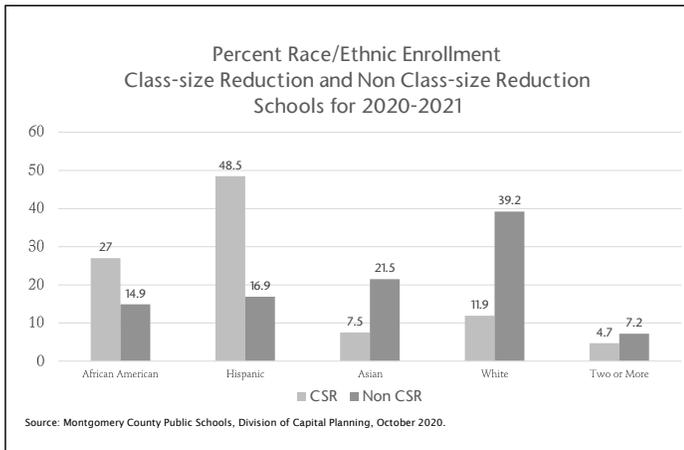
States has been steady for many years and does contribute program participants, the share of ESOL students born in the United States has been increasing. U.S.-born students make up approximately 65 percent of ESOL enrollment.

Class Size Reduction and Non Class Size Reduction Elementary Schools

For the 2020–2021 school year, there are 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 2019–2020 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 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 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 advent of full-day kindergarten, countywide since 2006, also has been a factor in kindergarten enrollment increases. The 2020–2021 kindergarten class is unusually low due to the COVID-19 health pandemic, and therefore considered anomalous. It is anticipated that there will be a return to 87 percent kindergarten capture to births five years earlier. 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. Due to a decade of large elementary enrollment increases, MCPS is now experiencing a period of growth at secondary schools. (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 12,900. 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 2020–2021 school year, MCPS operates 135 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 35 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.

