

# 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 is 159,182 for the 2024–2025 school year, a decrease of 1,041 students from the 2023–2024 school year. Enrollment grew by 2,735 students from the 2015–2016 to the 2024–2025 school year. Total school system enrollment is projected to increase to 162,178 students by the 2030–2031 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

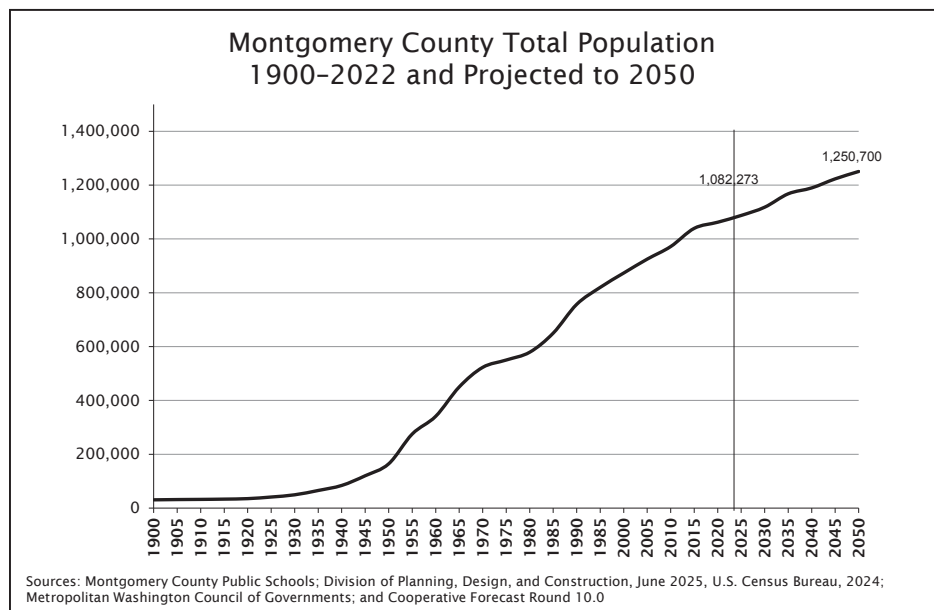
#### Population

Montgomery County’s overall population is growing and diversifying. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 2000 to 2024, the county’s total population has increased from 873,341

to 1,082,273 people. This is an increase of 208,932 people, or 23.9 percent. 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 2023 (the last year of available data), there have been 309,487 births compared to 141,838 deaths in the county, for a net natural population increase of 167,649 residents, accounting for 90.6 percent of the county’s overall population increase (Maryland Department of Health, 2023).

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.

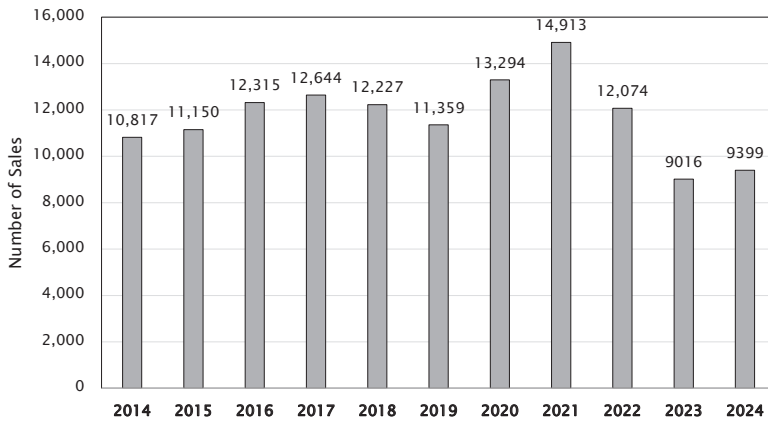
Montgomery County’s trend toward racial and ethnic diversification mirrors national demographic trends. According to U.S. Census Bureau data and Montgomery County Planning, between 2000 and 2023, the county’s White, non-Hispanic population decreased as a percentage of the total population by 23.4 percent 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.



#### 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 peaked in May 2020 at 9.8 percent, but has since declined to 2.9 percent as of April 2025 (Economic Indicator; Montgomery County Department of Finance, April 2020; Maryland Department of Labor; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

## Montgomery County Total Sales of Existing Homes by Year



Sources: Economic Indicators Reports to County Council, Montgomery County Department of Finance, July 2019, Greater Capital Area Association of Realtors, Housing Market Reports 2020-2024

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 \$608,878 in 2024, 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.

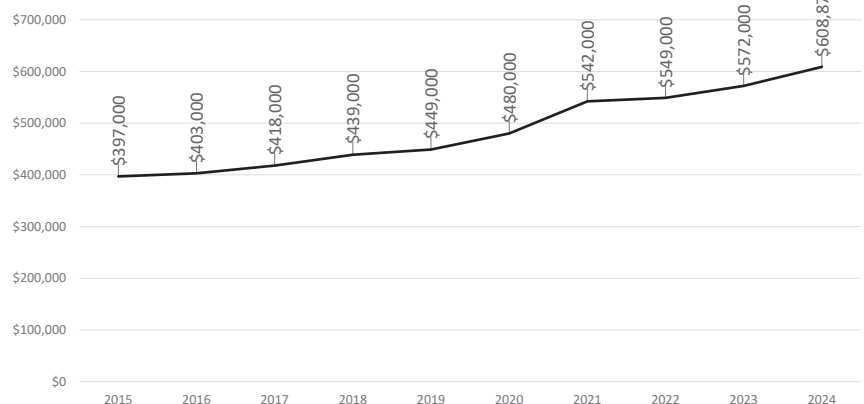
MCPS participates in county and city land use planning to ensure impacts on enrollment are considered and future school sites identified. (See Appendix C for further information on the role of MCPS in land use planning.) Moreover, MCPS monitors housing activity in all school service

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.

### Montgomery County Median Home Sales Prices 2015-2024



Source: Montgomery County Market Trends Reports, Greater Capital Area Association of Realtors

Additional information on the role of MCPS with respect to the County Growth and Infrastructure is in Appendix C. The FY 2026 school test, based on the enrollment projections and capital projects included in the adopted *FY 2026 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2025–2030 Capital Improvements Program*, will go into effect July 1, 2025. For results of the FY 2026 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. This downward trend continued in 2020 and 2021, however Births in 2022, were 11,738 for Montgomery County, 233 higher than 2021, marking a small post pandemic boom. The declining trend returned in 2023 (the last year available) with 10,896 births.

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 2024–2025 school year. Future kindergarten classes will most likely return to approximately 87.0 percent of births five years earlier.

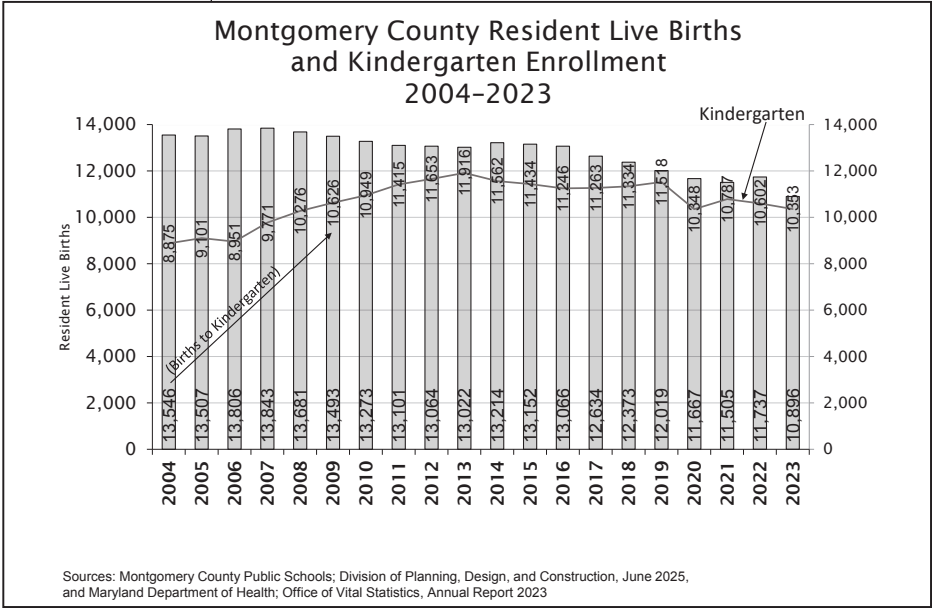
The movement up through the grades by students, termed the “aging of the student population,” is the second driver of enrollment change. When the size of the kindergarten class is different from that of Grade 12, then there is a natural change in total enrollment from one year to the next. The Grade 12 total for the 2023–2024 school year was 11,737, and the kindergarten class for the 2024–2025 school year is 10,059, or a difference between the two grades of 1,678 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 three years, that number has averaged roughly 2,650 students.

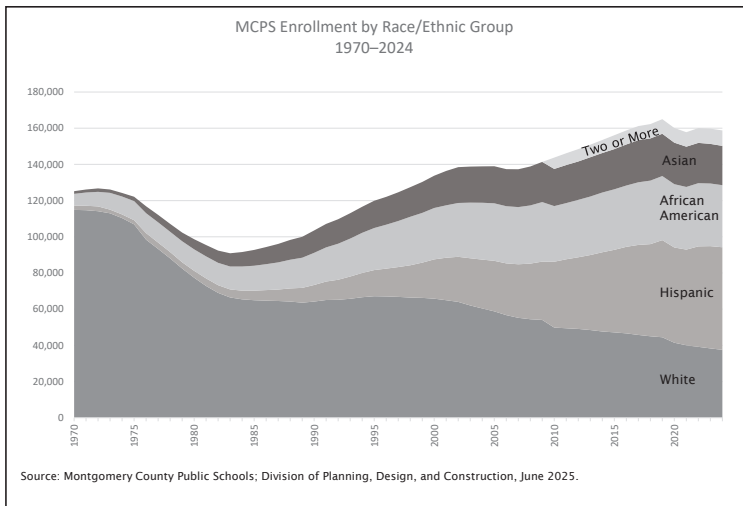
Migration, the third driver of enrollment change, can significantly fluctuate with economic conditions and international events, each of which can be volatile and difficult to predict. Records of MCPS student entries and withdrawals show that there has been a decrease in migration from approximately 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 11,847 in the 2024–2025 school year. Withdrawals over the same time increased from 10,186 in the 2010–2011 school year to 13,737 in the 2024–2025 school year. There were 1,890 more students withdrawing to attend other public, private, foreign, or home schools than entering the system in the 2024–2025 school year.

## Student Diversity

Records of county resident live births show a decline in the numbers of births in each racial/ethnic group except Hispanic. In 2023, the latest available data, there were 3,286 White, non-Hispanic births, 2,177 African American births, 1,459 Asian births, and 3,664 Hispanic births, as well as 221 births in other categories. The general fertility rate for Hispanic women between the ages 15 and 49 is 78.0 (per 1,000) versus 49.3 for African American women, 44.6 for Asian or Pacific Islander, 32.0 for non-Hispanic multi-race, and 46.3 for non-Hispanic White women in the same age range (Vital Statistics, Maryland Department of Health).

The official total enrollment (159,182) is broken into the following racial/ethnic self-identified categories: 21.5 percent of students are African American, 13.6 percent are Asian, 35.6 percent are Hispanic, and 23.6 percent are White, non-Hispanic, and 5.4 percent are 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.)

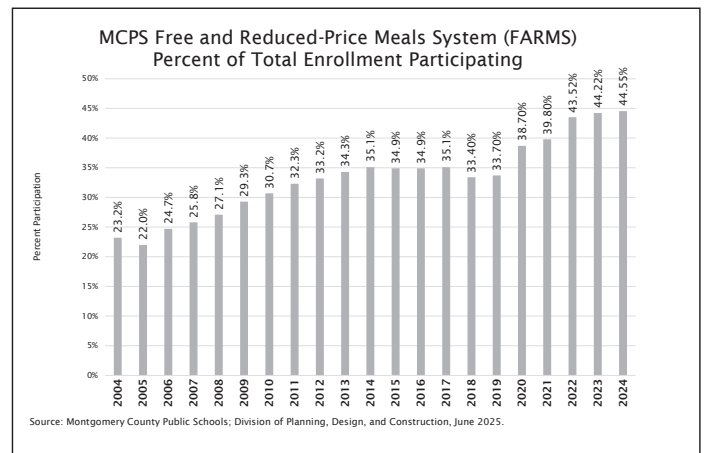
Student participation in the federal Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) Program is the school system’s primary measure of student socioeconomic levels. In the 2024–2025 school year, 44.6 percent of students participated in the FARMS Program. There has been an increase of 16,725 students participating in FARMS during the past 10 school years (2015–2016 to 2024–2025).

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 2015–2016 school year, 14.1 percent of students were in the ELD (previously known as ESOL) Program, and that has grown to 20.2 percent for the 2024–2025 school year. Emergent multilingual learners (EML) students in ELD represent approximately 150 countries of origin and speak an

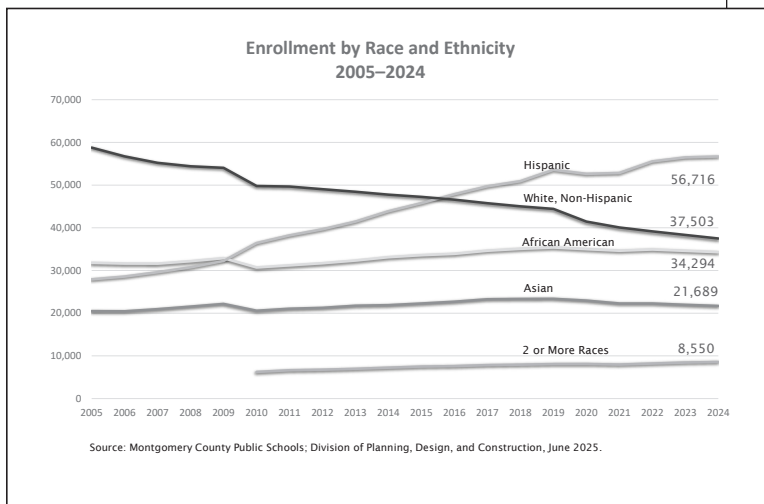
estimated 160 different languages. Although immigration to the United States does contribute program participants, a large proportion of EML students were born in the United States.

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

There are 69 Class Size Reduction (CSR) elementary schools (including upper schools in the case of paired schools) for the 2024–2025 school year. 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 2024–2025 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. Two or more families who share housing costs may occupy some of these homes. In these communities, enrollment growth has been driven by turnover of existing housing units.

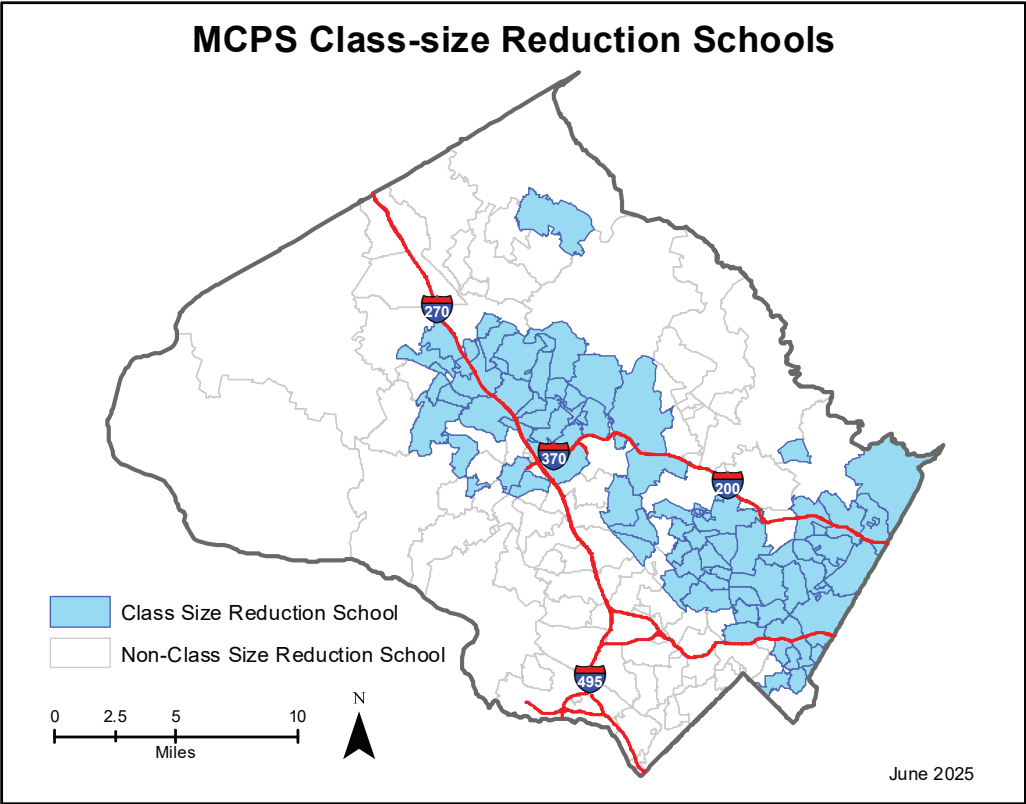
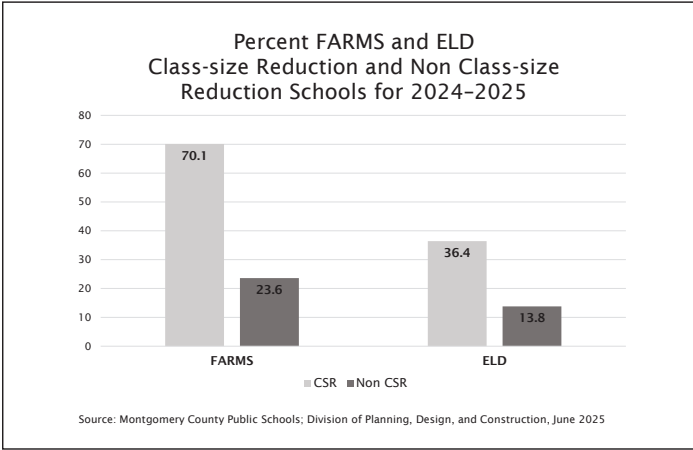
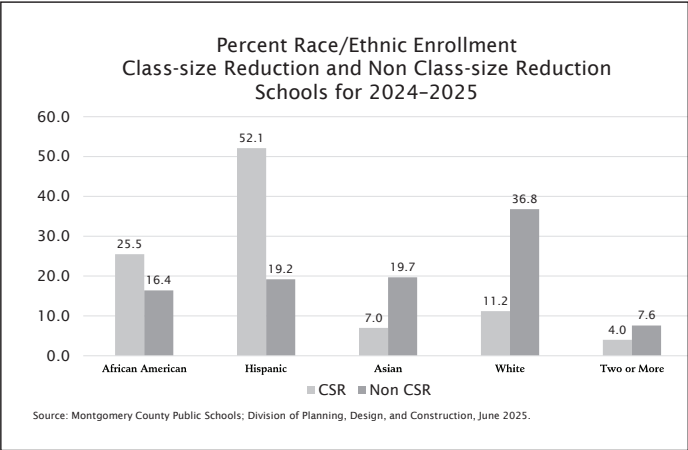




# MCPS Enrollment Forecast

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 2010–2019 school years. The 2024–2025 kindergarten class is smaller than 2023–2024 class. The capture rate (the percentage of resident births five years earlier to kindergarten enrollment) is 83.7 percent, which is approximately the same as the previous school year.

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. In some areas of the county, there will be growth due to new housing units or turnover in existing housing. 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. While births have been declining in the county since 2014, with the exception of 2022, the 5-year resident births average (2019-2023) is approximately 11,565, and is 3,104 higher than the official Baby Boom years. Housing developments, turnover,

migration patterns, and economics, as well as kindergarten capture affect changes in enrollment.

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 2024–2025 school year, MCPS operates 137 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, 1 career and technology high school, 1 alternative education center with one satellite center, 5 special schools, and 2 Early Childhood Centers. Since 1985, MCPS has 37 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, and 6 high schools that are new or have been reopened. During the next six years, additional school capacity will be added through new school openings, major capital projects, and classroom additions.

