

Chapter 2

The Planning Environment

Facility plans are developed in a dynamic planning environment, driven by changes in enrollment. 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. 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.

Preliminary September 30th student enrollment is 156,541 for the 2025–2026 school year, a decrease of 2,641 students from the 2024–2025 school year. Enrollment peaked in 2019 at 165,267, but has since declined to nearly the same as the 2015–2016 school year. Total school system enrollment is projected to decrease to 149,706 students by the 2031–2032 school year. This represents a shift in direction, 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. Additional declines in enrollment due in part to changes in the economic landscape of the region have shifted the direction of enrollment projections. Continued enrollment declines will result in the need for fewer relocatable classrooms and an exploration of non-capital solutions to address overutilization.

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 208,932 people, or 23.9 percent since 2000 from 873,341 to 1,082,273 people (2024). 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).

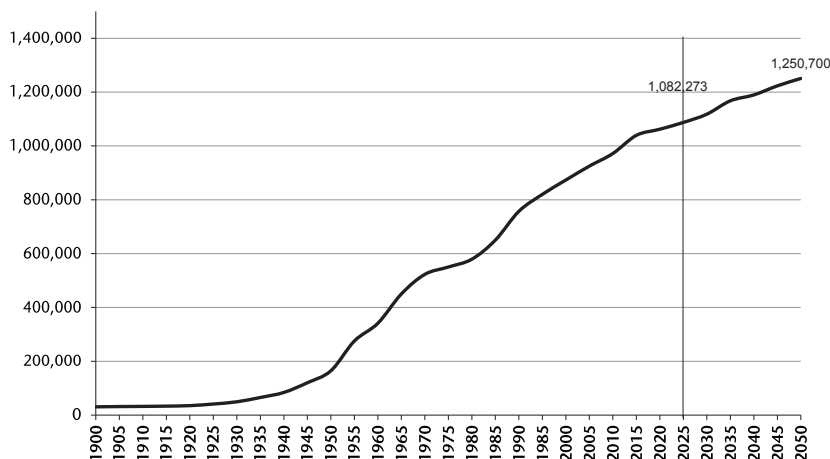
Migration patterns also are contributing to population growth. Between 2003 and 2022, international migration has been estimated to contribute 158,895 residents while domestic migration resulted in a loss of 154,554 residents, netting 4,341 new residents (Maryland Department of Planning). The 2023 estimate 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 for suburbs of major metropolitan areas. 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

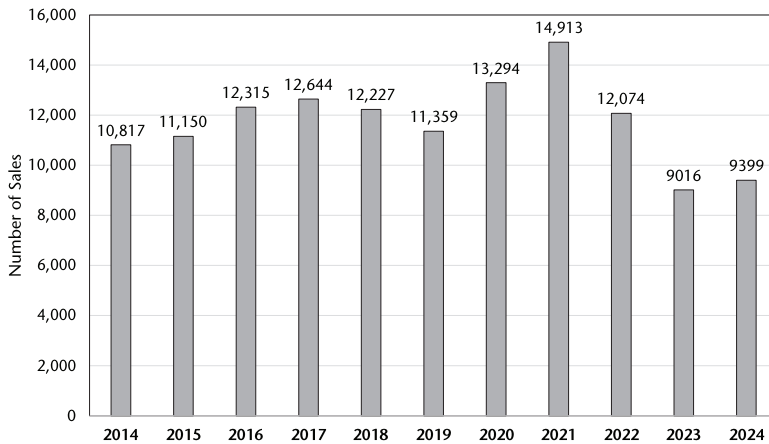
Montgomery County attracts families with its great schools, county resources, employment hubs, travel infrastructure, food and cultural experiences, and location within the DC Metro area. Prior to the COVID-19 health pandemic, the unemployment rate in

Montgomery County Total Population
1900–2022 and Projected to 2050



Sources: Montgomery County Public Schools; Department of Planning and Construction, October 2025, U.S. Census Bureau, 2024; Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments; and Cooperative Forecast Round 10.0

**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

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 4.0 percent as of August 2025 (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 being constructed. During the past 10 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

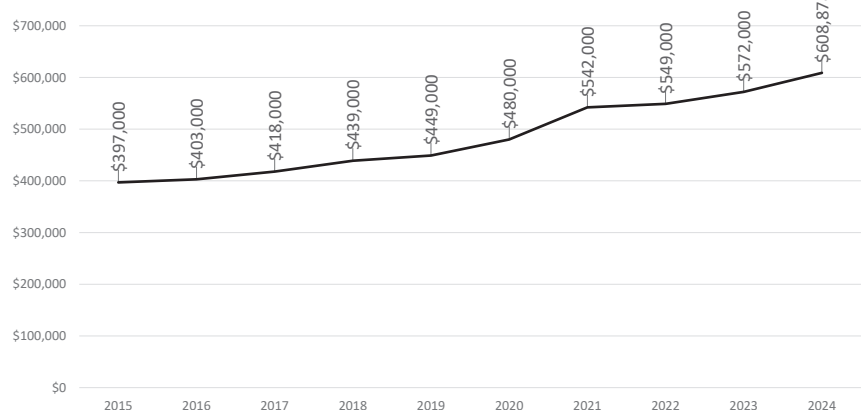
Traditional suburban residential development is becoming the exception in the county. Subdivisions in the Clarksburg area are among the last greenfield developments to be constructed in the county. The reopening of Charles W. Woodward High School as well as the opening of Crown High School in the 2027-2028 school year are in part due to the increased students from the housing developments in the North Bethesda Garrett Park Master Plan area, and Crown Farm developments in the City of Gaithersburg, respectively.

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 Sector Plan. 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.

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



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

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 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*, went 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 (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. Births peaked in 2007 at 13,843. Total births were less than 13,000 by 2017, and by 2020 dropped to 11,667. In 2022, births were 11,738 for Montgomery County, 233 higher than 2021, marking a small post pandemic boom. However, 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. The rate decreased to 68.1 percent by the 2006–2007 school year, and by the 2019-2020 school year increased to 87.2 percent. 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 84.8 percent in the 2025–2026 school year. Future kindergarten classes will most likely return to approximately 87.0 percent of births five years earlier.

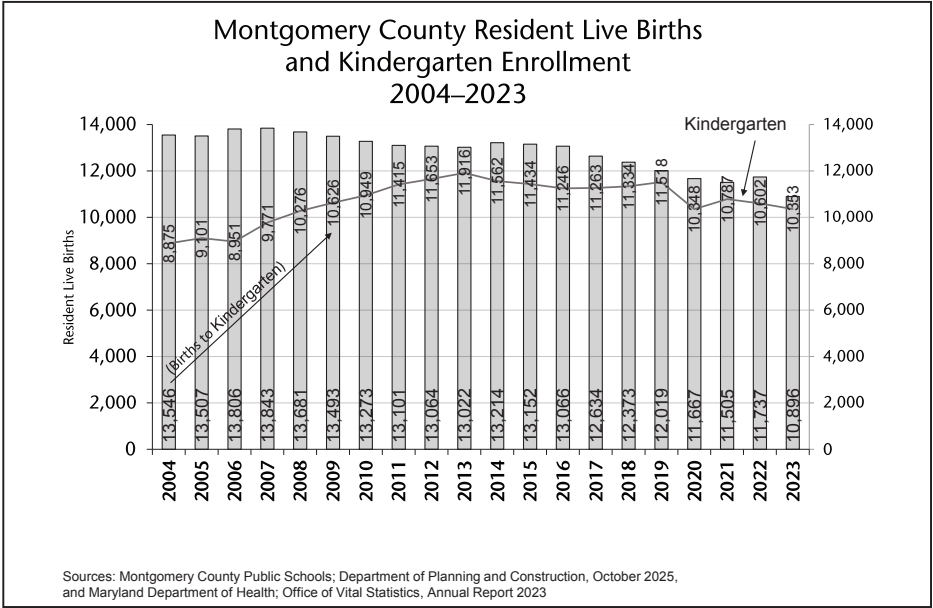
The movement up through the grades by students, termed the “aging of the student population,” is the second driver of enrollment change. When the size of the kindergarten class is different from that of Grade 12, then there is a natural change in total enrollment from one year to the next. The Grade 12 total for the 2024–2025 school year was 12,187, and the kindergarten

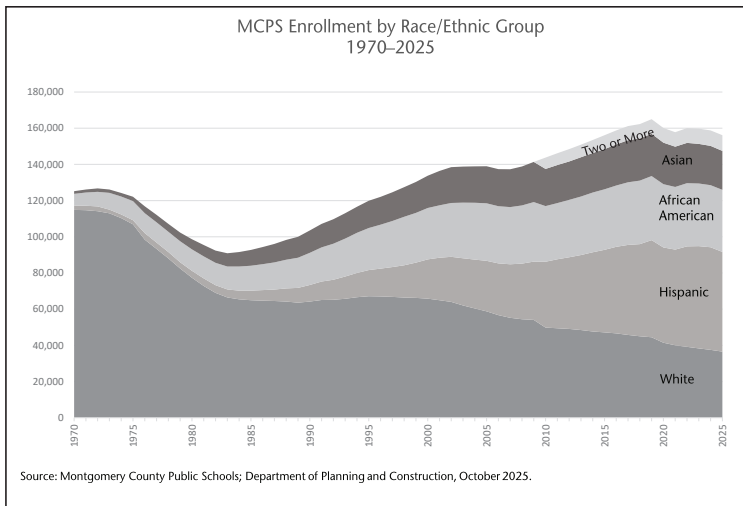
class for the 2025–2026 school year is 9,898, or a difference between the two grades of 2,289 students. Without other factors, enrollment naturally declines when the entering class is smaller than the graduating class. At all grade levels, students migrate into and out of the system to or from other districts, home schools, private schools, or international locations. 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 approximately 2,500 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 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 preliminary total enrollment (156,541) is broken into the following racial/ethnic self-identified categories: 21.9 percent of students are African American, 13.8 percent are Asian, 35.2 percent are Hispanic, and 23.3 percent are White, non-Hispanic, and 5.5 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. There has not been a majority racial/ethnic group since the 2000–2001 school year.

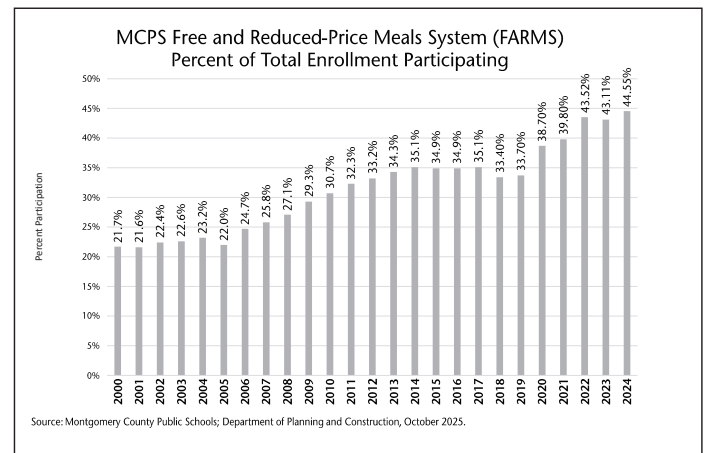
Also shown are enrollments in the four major racial and ethnic groups over the past two decades. It can be seen that the addition of a new category resulted in a dip in enrollment in 2010 in White, non-Hispanic, African American, and Asian students, as some identified with the “Two or More races” category. (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).

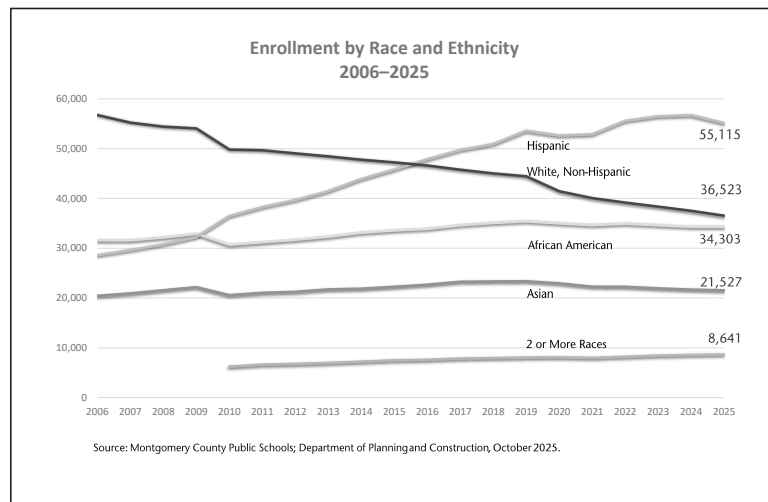
Student enrollment in the English Language Development (ELD) program is an indicator of student language diversity. As the school system has diversified over time, this percentage has grown. During the 2016–2017 school year, 14.7 percent of students were in the ELD (previously known as ESOL) Program, and that has grown to 19.4 percent for the 2025–2026 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 77 Class Size Reduction (CSR) elementary schools (including upper schools in the case of paired schools) for the 2025–2026 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 2025–2026 demographic composition of CSR and Non CSR schools is compared in the accompanying chart.



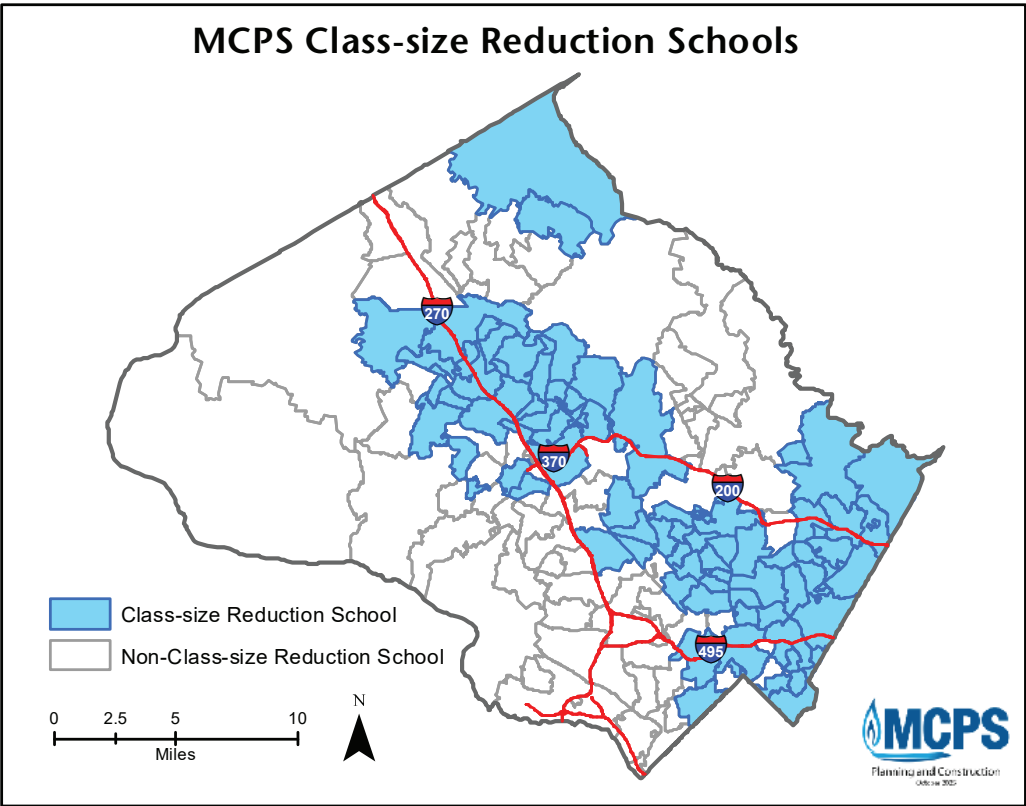
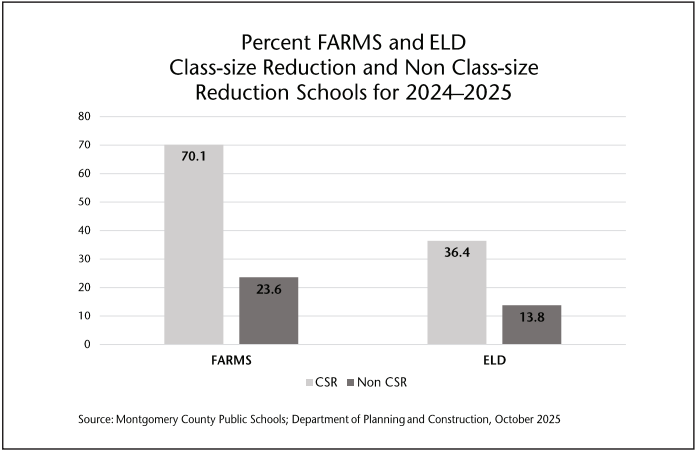
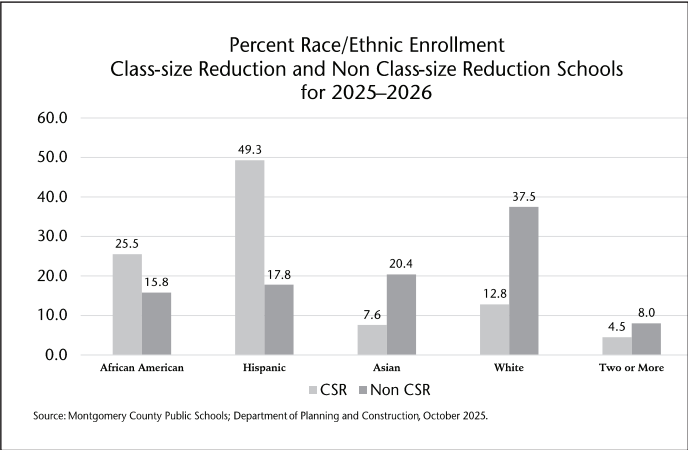
and earlier, as well as neighborhoods with older townhouses and single-family detached homes. Two or more families who share housing costs may occupy some of these homes. In these communities, enrollment growth has been largely driven by turnover of existing housing units.

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 2025–2026 kindergarten class is smaller than 2024–2025. The capture rate (the percentage of resident births five years earlier to kindergarten enrollment) is 84.8 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 first grade class in the 2021–2022 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 higher levels of 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 period of enrollment increases during the 1950s, through the early 1970s, when children from the Baby Boom era, born between 1946 and 1964, enrolled in schools, resulted in opening 155 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. During that decline, 60 schools were closed. The period between 1983 and 2019 saw additional growth as a much greater “baby boom” occurred in the county, and 60 schools were built or reopened. 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, which is 3,104 higher than the official Baby Boom years. Enrollment has declined by 8,726 students since the peak in 2019. Housing developments, turnover, migration patterns, and economics, births, and kindergarten capture, all affect changes in enrollment.

Keeping pace with prior enrollment growth, and accommodating class-size reductions through Title 1 and Focus elementary schools have required a major investment in school facilities. In the 2025–2026 school year, MCPS operates 137 elementary schools, 40 middle schools, 25 high schools, 1 career and technology high school, 1 alternative education center with 1 satellite center, 5 special schools, 1 charter school, 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 high school capacity will be added through the opening of Crown High School, reopening of Charles W. Woodward High School, and major capital projects. Since the enrollment is declining, the need for relocatable classrooms will be reduced, and there will be an effort to right size the portfolio.

