
3. Benchmarking

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What does benchmarking mean in this analysis?

Benchmarking is used to compare MCPS to other comparable school districts throughout the country, to better understand how MCPS compares in terms of the key lenses of this analysis and to document notable policies or practices used to address similar challenges elsewhere.

Benchmarks were chosen based on three criteria: NCEES (National Center for Education Statistics) peer database, past benchmarks of MCPS, and a review of recent relevant policies.

This Districtwide Boundary Analysis uses six school districts throughout the country as benchmarks: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools (NC), Duval County Public Schools (FL), Fairfax County Public Schools (VA), Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA), Houston Independent School District (TX), and Wake County Public Schools (NC).

Section Overview

This set of analyses is divided into two subsections:

1. Overview and Benchmark Profiles
2. Benchmarking Data Analysis

Each subsection opens with a set of key insights.

Benchmarking at a Glance

Benchmarking MCPS with other comparable districts around the country is an important layer of this analysis. Through benchmarking, this report seeks to equip MCPS and Montgomery County residents with an understanding of notable policies, practices, and challenges seen in other districts, as it relates to school boundaries and student assignment and the central lenses of this analysis: utilization, diversity, proximity, and student assignment stability.

The purpose of benchmarking in this analysis is to provide greater context to MCPS decision-makers and community members and develop insights about how MCPS compares to other school districts with respect to the analytical lenses of this Districtwide Boundary Analysis.

In addition, this benchmarking process identifies policies, programs, and historic milestones related to school boundaries in the selected school districts. This includes the criteria that benchmark districts use when making decisions about school boundaries. Though not exhaustive, these can serve as informative touchpoints for MCPS and residents of Montgomery County.

Benchmarking Methodology

Benchmarking Criteria

To select benchmarks, we used three sets of criteria to identify relevant school districts:

- **NCES Peers Database:** we used this national statistics database to identify comparable school districts using the criteria of total students, student/teacher ratio, percent children in poverty, district type, and urbanity locale code. These criteria were used to identify 100 “peer” districts across the US.
- **Relevant recent policies:** we conducted a policy and literature review to identify districts that have recent relevant policies and programs related to school boundaries, student assignment, and facilities planning.
- **MCPS past benchmarks:** finally, we considered past benchmarks used by MCPS, as a third form of criteria to inform the selection of benchmarks.

Based on these criteria, we identified a long list of potential benchmarks first, and then narrowed down this list with the aim of identifying school districts that satisfied as many of these criteria as possible.

Benchmarking: Approach and Limitations

Every school district has different practices in collecting, managing, and sharing data. In some cases, we could not access relevant data for a school district or districts, in which case this is noted along with the analysis. This analysis was also limited by the vintage of available datasets. Data related to utilization for each district was drawn from the most recently published data for each district (listed below).

The diversity analysis compares students who are enrolled in Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) programs as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics for the most recent available school year (2017-2018). National FRL guidelines align with the income brackets used by MCPS for FARMS (Free and Reduced-price Meals System). Nevertheless, FRL is a useful means for comparing economic disparities within student populations across districts.

The racial dissimilarity comparisons in this chapter are based on students whose race or ethnicity is reported; students for whom there is no data or incomplete data are excluded from that analysis.

Due to a lack of student-level data for the benchmark districts, the proximity comparison provides insight on the average distance between schools at each level in the benchmark districts and their three closest schools. This provides an approximation of the density of schools throughout each one of the districts.

Key Data Sources

- NCES (National Center for Education Statistics)
- 2021-2026 CIP Plan (Superintendent's Recommended FY2021 Capital Budget and the FY 2021-2026 Capital Improvements Program)
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Houston Independent School District: HISD 2019-20 Research and Accountability Report
- Wake County Public Schools 2018-19 Facilities Utilization Report
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: 2019-20 Facility Information; additional data provided by CMS
- Fairfax County Public Schools: FCPS CIP Plan 2020-21
- Data provided by Gwinnett County Public Schools Office of Planning
- Data provided by Duval County Public Schools

Analyses Conducted

1. Overview and Benchmark Profiles
2. Benchmarking Data Analysis (Utilization, Diversity, Proximity)

3.1 Overview and Benchmark Profiles

This section includes an overview of how MCPS compares to the selected benchmarks, followed by a summary profile of each of the six selected benchmarks.

Questions:

- What kinds of student assignment models do these districts use?
- What are the core criteria for creating and changing school boundaries in these districts?
- What are the notable programs and policies in these districts, as it relates to school boundaries and the central lenses of this analysis?

Sub-sections:

1. Benchmarking Overview and Table
2. Benchmarking Profiles:
 - A. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS)
 - B. Duval County Public Schools (DCPS)
 - C. Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)
 - D. Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS)
 - E. Houston Independent School District (HISD)
 - F. Wake County Public School System (WCPSS)

Insights

1. MCPS and all benchmarks have attendance areas determined by home address and feeder patterns that progress from elementary through high school. But these feeder patterns are organized differently.

MCPS has a cluster-based system, where most ES students attend the same MS as their peers, and most MS students attend the same HS as their peers, with instances of split articulation at both levels.

GCPS also has a clearly defined cluster system, in which HS attendance areas include the ES and MS schools that feed into the HS. Unlike MCPS, however, there are multiple different schools that a student may be assigned to, as opposed to one base school at each level.

FCPS and HISD both have defined feeder patterns divided into five administrative regions. Students generally feed from one school to the next alongside their peers, with instances of split articulation between ES and MS, and MS and HS. In FCPS, feeder patterns are known as “pyramids.”

DCPS has a feeder pattern with geographically defined ES, to MS, to HS patterns and many instances of split articulation. In CMS and WCPSS, students are assigned to a particular feeder pattern, but may or may not attend the same schools as their cohort of peers as they progress through school levels.

2. There were known boundary changes within the last five years in MCPS and also in all six benchmark districts.

Some districts, like MCPS, GCPS, and DCPS regularly review school boundaries to determine the need for boundary studies and changes. Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board completes a comprehensive student assignment review every six years. MCPS and four of the benchmarked districts have specific policies that guide the creation and adjustment of boundaries.

3. In addition to MCPS, two of the other benchmark districts have island assignment areas.

MCPS has several non-contiguous attendance areas, or island assignments, which are discussed throughout this report. WCPSS and FCPS also have island assignments.

4. MCPS and five of the six benchmark districts have school choice programs.

While all of the benchmark districts have geographically defined assignment areas for all three school levels, most have school choice and/or magnet programs. In all cases, voluntary integration of the school district factored in to the original or current goals of the choice programs. Some districts emphasize choice more than others. For instance, HISD has a wide array of choice programs—from career readiness programs, multiple kinds of academic magnet tracks, and fine arts choice programs. FCPS has a narrower focus in its choice programs, with an emphasis on general education magnet programs within or outside of the base schools of high performing students.

1. Overview and Benchmarking Table

The tables below show a range of comparisons between MCPS and the six selected benchmark districts. The criteria used to select each benchmark are noted in **Figure 3.1**, and limitations or gaps in available data are indicated.

District	State	Benchmark Selection Criteria			Total Number Operational Public Schools (by level)	Total Students (excludes adult education) 2017-18	Pop Density (persons per square mile)	Land Area (square miles)
		NCES	Past MCPS benchmark	Relevant policy				
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MCPS)	Maryland				135 ES 40 MS 25 HS*	165,267	2,109	493
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS (CMS)	North Carolina			X	110 ES 27 MS 35 HS	147,631	2,014	524
DUVAL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)	Florida	X		X	126 ES 28 MS 40 HS*	129,583	1,212	763
FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (FCPS)	Virginia	X	X	X	139 ES 25 MS 28 HS*	188,556	2,925	391
GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (GCPS)	Georgia	X			82 ES 29 MS 1 SEC** 23 HS	179,266	2,135	416
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (HISD)	Texas		X		181 ES 43 MS 1 SEC** 50 HS*	214,175	4,462	330
WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (WCPSS)	North Carolina	X	X	X	114 ES 37 MS 1 SEC** 31 HS	161,417	1,254	835

Figure 3.1 Benchmark Comparisons at a Glance (table)

*In addition to schools listed: FCPS (2 'Other'; 24 'Not Applicable'; 4 Pre-K); HISD (4 Pre-k; 4 other); DCPS (8 Other; 2 Pre-k); WCPSS (4 not reported); MCPS (8 special education schools)

**SEC: Secondary school other than high school

1.2. Assignment Structures and Policies

In the table below, benchmark districts are compared in terms of basic elements related to student assignment structure and school boundaries (which are covered in more detail in the benchmarking profiles in this chapter, starting on **page 325**).

Agency Name	Feeder pattern? (y/n)	School choice/magnet program(s)? (y/n)	Policy that Guides Boundary Changes (and criteria)	Recent Boundary Changes**	Other notable policies/ programs
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MCPS)	Y	Y	Board of Education Policy FAA	2019-20; 2018-19; 2017-18; 2016-17; 2014-15; 2013-14; 2012-13;	Consortia; Paired Schools
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS (CMS)	Y	Y	School Board Policy - Chapter J, Section JCA	2017-18 (ongoing)	School Board Community Equity Committee; Non-magnet School Options; Paired Schools
DUVAL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)	Y	Y	Duval County Public School Board Policy Handbook- Chapter 5, Section 5.44	2015-16; 2010-11	Full Service Schools Program
FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (FCPS)	Y	Y	Policy Manual for the Fairfax County School Board- Policy 8130.6 (currently under review)	2018-19; 2016-17; 2014-15; 2013-14; 2011-12	One Fairfax Equity Plan; Young Scholars Model; Advanced Academic Programs
GWINNETT COUNTY (GCPS)	Y	N*	n/a	2015-16; (and others)***	E-SPLOST
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (HISD)	Y	Y	n/a***	2015-16 n/a***	HISD 2012 Bond Program; Local and Regional Hubs
WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (WCPSS)	Y	Y	Policy Code: 4150 School Assignments and Transfers	2020-21; 2019-20	Year Round Schools

Figure 3.2 Benchmark Comparisons: Student Assignment Structures;

*Each benchmark district except for FCPS has charter schools.

**Most comprehensive information available from MCPS; other district information from NCES data portal representing school year 2017-2018 (latest available year)

***Lack of available data

2. Benchmarking Profiles

A. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

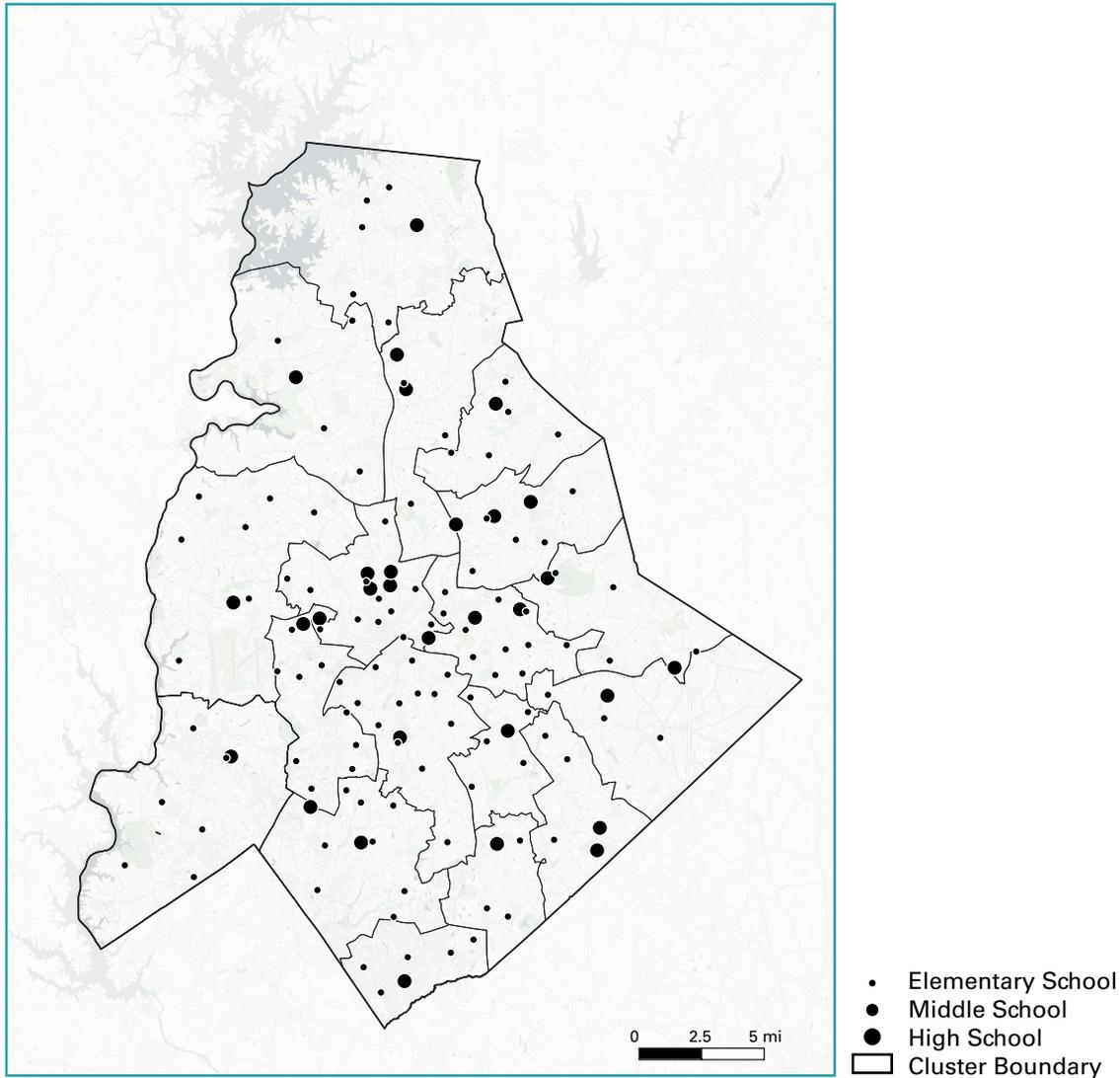


Figure 3.3 Map of CMS High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	CMS	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	172	200
Total students	147,631	165,267
Land area (square miles)	524	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	2,014	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	108%*	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	68%	38%

*Target utilization range is 90-105% (source: CMS Planning Department)

Overview

Founded in 1882, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is now the 18th largest school district in the country.¹ Located in North Carolina, the school district is centered on the city of Charlotte, at the southern border of the state. The school district manages all schools in the City of Charlotte and county of Mecklenburg.

Student Assignment Structure

There are two types of schools in CMS: home schools and school options. Home schools are schools with geographic attendance boundaries and are cluster based with only one middle school island assignment. Every student is assigned to a home school based on their address. Students are automatically assigned to their home school upon enrollment. Transportation is provided to home schools.

School options are schools that do not have fixed attendance boundaries. There are 65 schools that have over 90 school choice programs.² These are mostly magnet schools and are governed by the School Board's magnet policies. Magnet schools may be partial or full programs. Partial programs reserve a portion of their seats for students residing within a fixed home school attendance area, providing a "home school guarantee" or guaranteed access to the magnet program for people in the attendance zone. For full programs, all seats are assigned via the school options lottery.

For the school options lottery, also known as the school choice program, seats are allocated across socioeconomic status to achieve the greatest diversity possible. Each student is classified as high, medium, or low socioeconomic status based on home address and data that their family provides during the lottery application.³ Students who are attending a school that has been designated by the state as low performing for three consecutive years get an additional priority in the school choice lottery called the School Performance Priority. Additional priorities for lottery applications include priority for students who live within one third of a mile from a full magnet program, and "transportation zone priority" for students who live within the transportation zone for the school options for which they are applying.

CMS only guarantees transportation for students who reside in the transportation zone for the program in which they are enrolled, or students assigned to home schools through the Special Performance Priority.

1 "Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools." n.d. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cms.k12.nc.us/communications/aboutus/Pages/History.aspx>.

2 Annie Ma. n.d. "Here's What You Need to Know About Round 2 of the Choice Lottery." Charlotte Observer. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/education/article238584898.html>.

3 "CMS Choice: FAQ's" n.d. CMS Choice. <https://cmschoice.org/faqs/>.

Policies

For any changes to student assignment policy, the School Board must follow the guidelines outlined in Chapter J (Students) section JCA (Student Assignment Plan) in the School Board Policies. Section JCA lays out the Board’s student assignment goals as the following:¹

- Provide choice and promote equitable access to varied and viable programmatic options for all children.
- Maximize efficiency in the use of school facilities, transportation, and other capital and operational resources to reduce overcrowding.
- Reduce the number of schools with high concentrations of low income and high-needs children.
- Provide school assignment options to students assigned to schools that are not meeting performance standards established by the state.
- Preserve and expand schools and programs in which students are successfully achieving the mission and vision of the Board.²

From these goals, the School Board has specific mandates and considerations for creating attendance boundaries and for defining magnet school matching policy. When establishing school attendance boundaries for students’ homes schools, the Board considers **facility capacity, travel distance** for students to their home school, **keeping neighborhoods intact, population density** within neighborhoods and school attendance areas, and **keeping elementary attendance areas intact** as part of middle and high school feeder patterns. For new or updated boundaries, the Board considers boundaries that contribute to a socio-economically diverse student population. The Board cannot take any action on changing the boundaries until they have a public hearing. Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board completes a comprehensive student assignment review every six years.

History

CMS last approved boundary changes for the 2018-19 school year. Prior to that, their student assignment review beginning in 2016 resulted in the student assignment plan approved by the Board of Education in 2017. Part of this process yielded the creation of the Student Assignment Goals which are now part of the School Board policy for any changes to student assignment policy. This plan is still

1 “Policy JCA: Student Assignment Plan.” 2016. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools. <https://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/StudentPlacement/PlanningServices/20172018StuAsgnReview/Documents/JCA,%20Student%20Assignment%20Plan,%20Approved%2011-9-16.pdf>.

2 “BoardDocs® Policy: JCA Student Assignment Plan.” n.d. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools. Accessed March 8, 2020. <https://go.boarddocs.com/nc/cmsnc/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=B25LFU558C97>.

in place and has been implemented in stages since Fall 2017.¹

An initial school choice program and a shift to neighborhood schools was implemented in 2002 after the courts ruled in *Capacchione v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* that schools could not use race as a factor for integrating schools. However, since the implementation of the 2002 student assignment plan, Charlotte-Mecklenburg had seen increased concentrations of poverty over time, a trend that helped push CMS toward new choice program policies in 2016.²

Other notable programs and policies

- **School Board Community Equity Committee**

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board will convene a Community Equity Committee in 2020. This group will review and discuss data and programs in the school district in order to monitor progress toward equity.

- **School Pairing**

In an attempt to address racial and socio-economic isolation in schools, some CMS schools are paired with nearby schools. Paired schools split the grades between the two schools, with the aim of racial and socioeconomic integration. For example, students zoned for Billingsville and Cotswold elementary schools (located in adjacent neighborhoods with differing demographics) are zoned together into one paired school: as the primary campus, Billingsville has all students grades K-2; as the intermediate campus, Cotswold has all students grades 3-5.³

- **Non-magnet School Options**

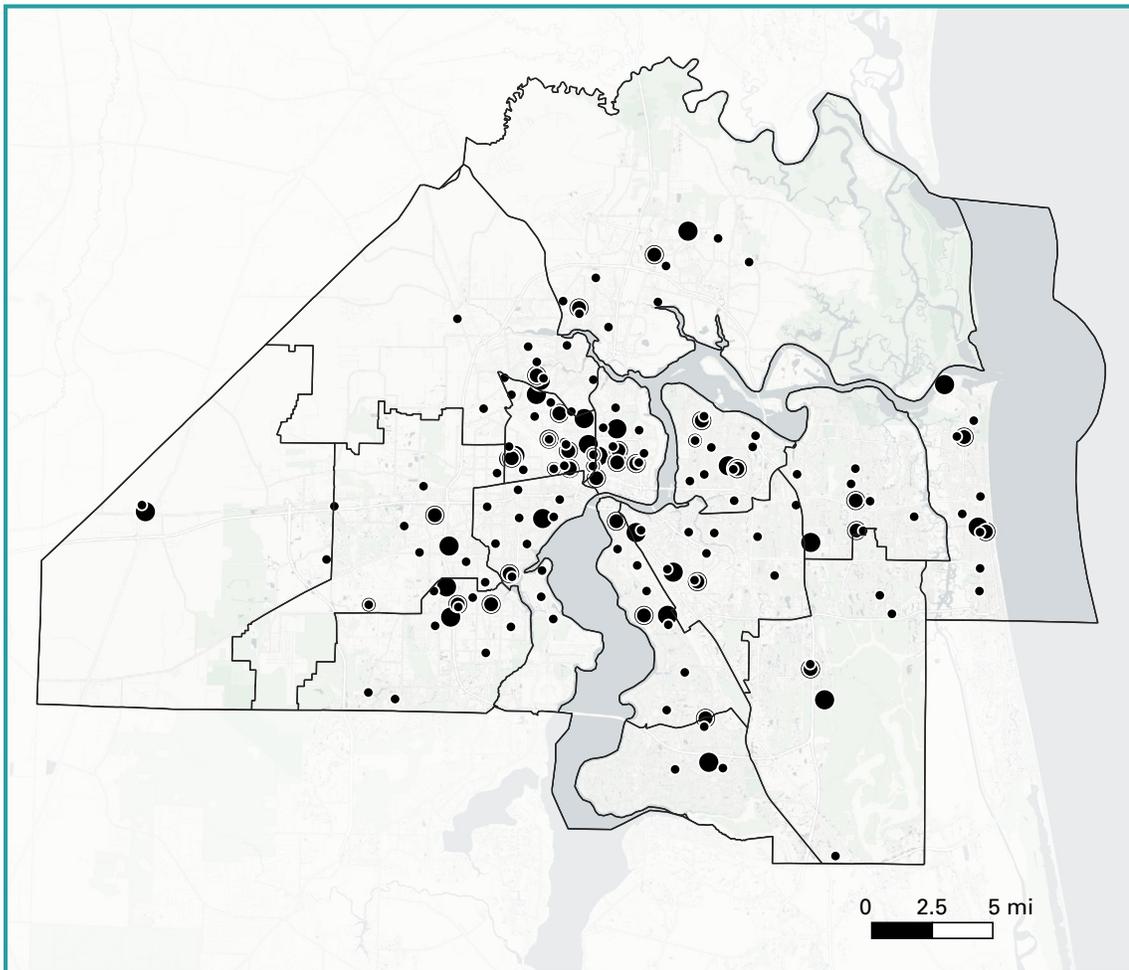
Broader than magnet schools and not governed by the Board's magnet policies, non-magnet school options include but are not limited to middle and early colleges, innovative small schools, and e-Learning academies.

1 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. n.d. "2017-2018 Student Assignment Review." Accessed March 8, 2020. <https://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/StudentPlacement/PlanningServices/20172018StuAsgnReview/Pages/default.aspx>.

2 "History of CMS." n.d. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Accessed March 8, 2020. <https://www.cms.k12.nc.us/communications/aboutus/Pages/History.aspx>.

3 Emma Way. 2019. "Together. Separate. Together Again." Charlotte Magazine, September 16, 2019. <https://www.charlottemagazine.com/together-separate-together-again/>.

B. Duval County Public Schools



- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Cluster Boundary

Figure 3.4 Map of DCPS High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	DCPS	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	194	200
Total students	129,583	165,267
Land area (square miles)	763	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	1,212	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	79%*	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	61%	38%

*Target utilization range is 90-110% (source: "Duval County Public Schools Long Range Facilities Master Plan." 2007. Duval County Public Schools. https://dcps.duvalschools.org/cms/lib07/FL01903657/Centricity/domain/4415/projects/selection%20booklets/forms%20and%20standards/DCPS_2007%20LRFMP_Final_April2007.pdf.)

Overview

Duval County is centered on the city of Jacksonville, at the northeast corner of the state of Florida. DCPS is the 20th largest school district in the United States. The school district was founded in 1864.¹

Duval County Public Schools was a benchmark for MCPS in MCPS's 2016 "Montgomery County Public Schools: Study of Choice and Special Academic Programs."

Student Assignment Structure

DCPS has three student assignment policies based on the three types of schools they have: attendance area schools, magnet schools, and special transfer option schools.

Attendance area schools are schools that have corresponding attendance boundaries. Assignments for these schools are cluster based. These schools serve students residing within their attendance boundary. Some attendance area schools offer magnet or special transfer options programs that serve both neighborhood students as well as students who apply to the school outside of the specified attendance area.

To attend a magnet school, students enter a lottery system where seats are allocated based on priority and choice. Selection criteria include neighborhood preference, socioeconomic background, sibling preference, and academic performance.² There are over 30 programs in more than 50 schools.³

Students can also attend a non-neighborhood elementary or middle school by using the Special Transfer Option. All elementary and middle schools provide this option for a limited number of students living outside of the school's assignment area. As with magnet schools, families must submit a separate application for these schools. All applications are processed based on priority categories and given in order of priority category until the available seats are filled. Transportation to Special Transfer Option Schools is the responsibility of the parent or guardian.⁴

1 "Public Schools in Duval County: Timeline of Major Events (1864-2014)." 2016. Quality Education for All Fund. <http://www.qeafund.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Timeline-2016-Version.pdf>.

2 "Duval County Public Schools School Choice Reference Guide." n.d. DCPS. https://dcps.duvalschools.org/cms/lib/FL01903657/Centricity/Domain/4417/DCPS_School%20Choice%20Catalog_2020.pdf.

3 "School Choice/ Magnet / Magnet Schools." <https://dcps.duvalschools.org/Page/7279>.

4 "School Choice/ Magnet / Special Transfer Option Schools." <https://dcps.duvalschools.org/Page/7283>.

Policies

Chapter 5 (Students), Section 5.44 (School Attendance Boundaries) of the Duval County Public School Board Policy Handbook sets the guidelines for attendance area boundaries. The Policy Handbook is reviewed in full on a two-year rotation, with the last update to Section 5.44 in January 2019. Section 5.44 begins with goals related to diversity, specifically highlighting the value of integrated schools for student success. According to Section 5.44, to establish attendance boundaries, the Board considers **capacity, proximity, siblings, diversity, and assignment stability**. The District conducts an annual enrollment review which it then submits to the Board with recommendations. If boundary changes are recommended, the Superintendent's Office is responsible for starting a community consultation process called the Academic and Community Excellence Planning Process. This process includes consultations with school principals, a working group, and community meeting(s). After this process, the Superintendent submits their final boundary change recommendations to the School Board, which votes on the changes.¹

Magnet school policy and magnet school student admissions, eligibility criteria, and priority groups are determined by Chapter 5 (Students), Section 5.46 (Magnet Schools and Programs) of the Duval County Public School Board Policy Handbook, which was last updated in July 2019. Section 5.46 states that the purpose of magnet school programs is to promote and maintain diversity, provide a unique or specialized curriculum or approach, improve achievement for all participating students, and stabilize student assignment.

For deciding whether a new magnet school or program should be built or replicating a magnet school program in a new building, the Superintendent considers equitable access, maintaining and promoting diverse student bodies, preventing displacement or adding undue burdens to students, and many other factors.

Special Transfer Options are determined by Chapter 5 (Students), Section 5.22 (Student Transfer Policy) of the School Board Policy Handbook.²

1 "Board Policy Manual, Chapter 5: Students" n.d. Duval County Public Schools. <https://dcps.duvalschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=12486&dataid=9212&FileName=CHAPTER%205%20-%20Board%20Policy%20Manual-12-18-19.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

History

Attendance boundaries in DCPS were last changed for the start of the 2015-16 school year and before that were changed for the 2010-11 school year.^{1 2} The boundary changes in 2015-16 were part of an effort to address lower performing schools and offer a stronger menu of educational options to attract and retain students to traditional public schools –including converting low performing schools to magnet schools.³

Duval County started their magnet schools in 1991-1992 as a result of an NAACP lawsuit against the school system. From this suit, the School Board and NAACP agreed to a plan that replaced forced busing with a system of magnet schools as a voluntary desegregation plan.⁴

Other notable programs and policies

- **Full Service Schools Program**

Started in 1990, this program houses free social services within schools that are responsive to the specific needs of the neighborhood in which the school is located. These services include tutoring, mental health services, healthcare, social work, enrichment activities, and more.⁵

1 Kent Justice. 2016. "Duval County School Board Passes Five Boundary Change Proposals." News 4 Jax. February 4, 2016. <https://www.news4jax.com/news/2016/02/04/duval-county-school-board-passes-five-boundary-change-proposals/>.

2 "2015 – 2016 Boundary Proposals / 2016-2017 School Program Updates." n.d. Duval County Public Schools. <https://dcps.duvalschools.org/domain/8498>

3 Ibid.

4 "Duval County Public Schools School Choice Reference Guide." n.d. DCPS. https://dcps.duvalschools.org/cms/lib/FL01903657/Centricity/Domain/4417/DCPS_School%20Choice%20Catalog_2020.pdf.

5 "Student Discipline & Support Services / Full Service Schools." n.d.. <https://dcps.duvalschools.org/Page/18837>.

C. Fairfax County Public Schools

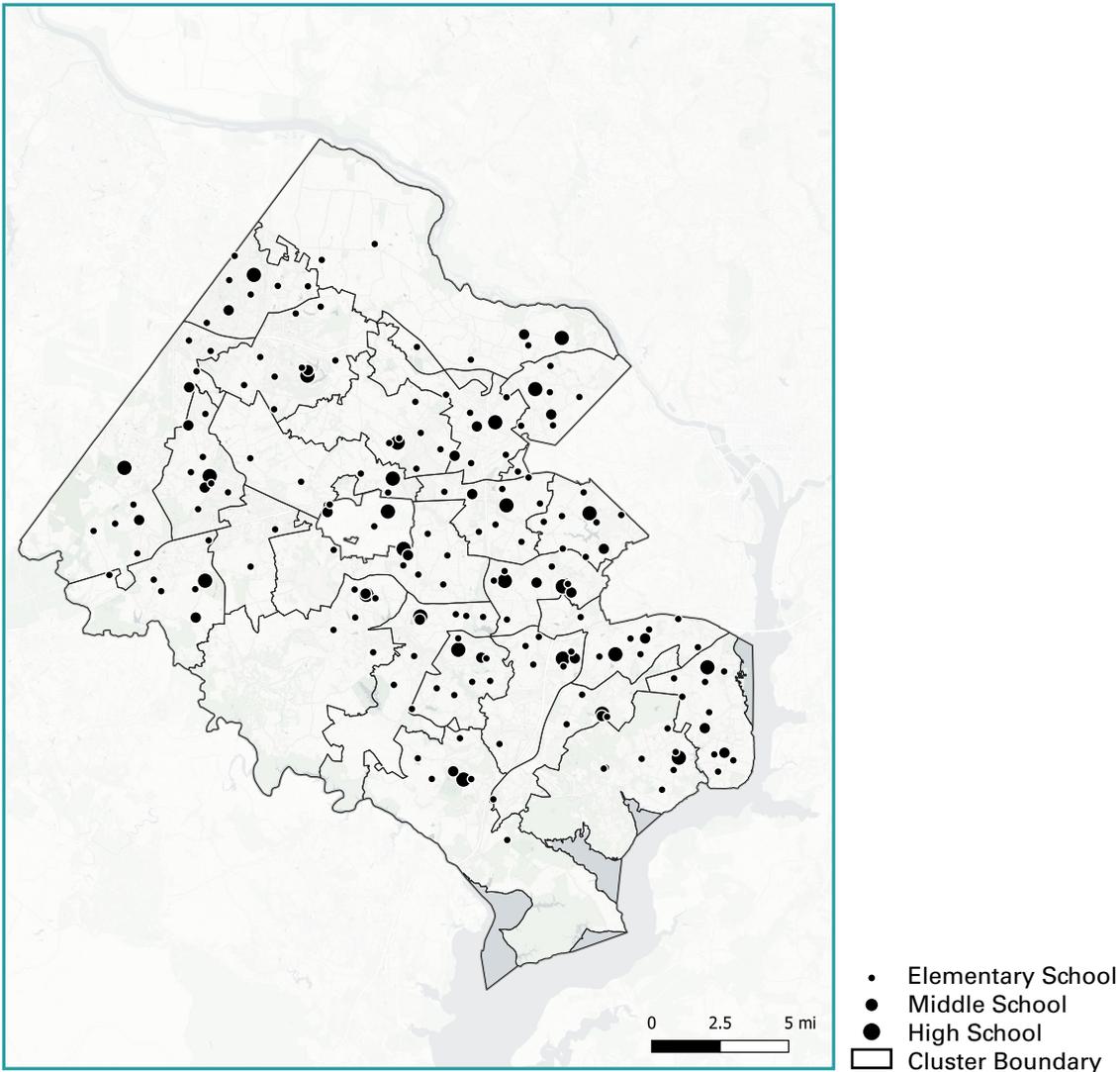


Figure 3.5 Map of FCPS High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	FCPS	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	192	200
Total students	188,556	165,267
Land area (square miles)	391	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	2,925	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	92%*	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	32%	38%

*Target utilization range is between 85-95% (source: Fairfax County Public Schools)

Overview

FCPS was established in 1870 and today is the 10th largest school division in the United States.^{1 2} Fairfax County is located outside of Washington, D.C.

Student Assignment Structure

FCPS generally uses cluster-based geographic student assignments. FCPS uses a feeder system centered around high school “pyramids” (akin to clusters in MCPS). Within high school pyramids, there is sometimes split articulation at the elementary and middle school levels.³ Geographic boundaries for assignments are determined by Policy 8130.6 in the Policy Manual for the Fairfax County School Board.⁴

Policies

According to Policy 8130.6, the Fairfax County School Board has the power to change school boundaries and student assignment plans, or close schools and may do so “in order to maintain or **improve operating efficiency** and/or **instructional effectiveness**.”⁵ The Division Superintendent can make adjustments to the school attendance areas as well, but only to understand specific circumstances and after consultation with the School Board. According to the Code of Virginia, the School board must obtain public comment through a public hearing on boundary changes or student assignment plans.⁶

Regulation 3333 governs location guidelines for special programs and services in FCPS. This regulation establishes the School Board’s guidelines for the conditions of relocating existing or establishing new programs. Key factors considered include enrollment changes/overcrowding, transportation, new schools/additions, stability of programs, impact of the number of special programs on a school, and facility needs.⁷

Fairfax County begins monitoring schools for overcapacity once they reach a utilization rate of 95-104% and considers a school to be underutilized when it drops below 85%.⁸

1 “Our History.” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/history>.

2 “About Us.” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps>.

3 “Feeder List SY2016-17” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. <https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Feeder%20List%20SY2016-17.pdf>.

4 “Policy 8130.7: Facilities Services.” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/\\$file/P8130.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/$file/P8130.pdf). [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/\\$file/P8130.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/$file/P8130.pdf).

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 “R3333: Location Guidelines.” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/8J3KBE4FC2C0/\\$file/R3333.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/8J3KBE4FC2C0/$file/R3333.pdf).

8 “Capital Improvement Program FY 2019-23.” n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Proposed%20FY%202019-23%20CIP_0.pdf.

History

Policy 8130.6 was last updated in May 2013 but has been under review since 2018. A factsheet from FCPS says that the School Board began discussions regarding boundary policy for the following reasons: overcrowding in FCPS, the fact that boundaries had not been updated since 1986, lack of transparency in the Superintendent's expedited process for making boundary changes, and the Fairfax School Board's recently adopted One Fairfax Policy committing the county and schools to consider equity.¹

From a July 2019 work session, FCPS staff presented a draft policy that listed specific criteria to determine when and how a boundary should be redrawn. After this working session, the School Board requested that the Superintendent hire an outside consultant to work with the Board to identify best practices in boundary policy, engage the community in conversation, and identify areas of overcrowding that are not included in the Capital Improvement program.^{2 3}

According to the FY 2021-25 CIP, FCPS has made boundary changes in most of the last ten school years.⁴ This includes standard boundary changes (in which 15% or more of students are affected at a school), program boundary changes (indicating a change in location for an existing program), and administrative boundary changes (indicating a change in which circumstances were considered to be an emergency, the change concerns new unoccupied housing, or less than 5% of students at a school will be impacted).⁵

Other notable programs and policies

- **One Fairfax Equity Plan**

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and School Board adopted the One Fairfax plan in November 2017. One Fairfax is a social and racial equity policy that commits the School Board to an equity minded decision-making framework. From this policy, FCPS created a Chief Equity Officer role to ensure that the school district meets its policy commitments.⁶

1 "Fairfax County Public Schools Boundary Fact Sheet." n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Boundary%20Fact%20Sheet_final.pdf

2 Angela Woolsey. 2019. "To Some Opposition, FCPS Considers Boundary Policy Overhaul." FairfaxTimes, July 26, 2019. http://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/to-some-opposition-fcps-considers-boundary-policy-overhaul/article_d3dacdfa-afd9-11e9-b2fa-9f370ff28b07.html

3 "Superintendent Committed to Transparent Process During Boundary Policy Review | Fairfax County Public Schools." 2019. FCPS.Edu. September 13, 2019. <https://www.fcps.edu/news/superintendent-committed-transparent-process-during-boundary-policy-review>

4 "Capital Improvement Program FY 2021-25." n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Proposed-CIP-FY-2021-25_0.pdf

5 "P8130. Facilities Services: Facilities Planning - Local School Boundaries, Program Assignments, and School Closings." n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. [https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/\\$file/P8130.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/97KJK54D54F8/$file/P8130.pdf)

6 "One Fairfax | Fairfax County Public Schools." n.d. Fairfax County Public Schools. <https://www.fcps.edu/onefairfax>

- **Young Scholars Model**

The Young Scholars Model is a program designed to increase diversity in advanced academic programs. This program is part of the FCPS Advanced Academic Programs, which oversees all programming for advanced students.^{1 2}

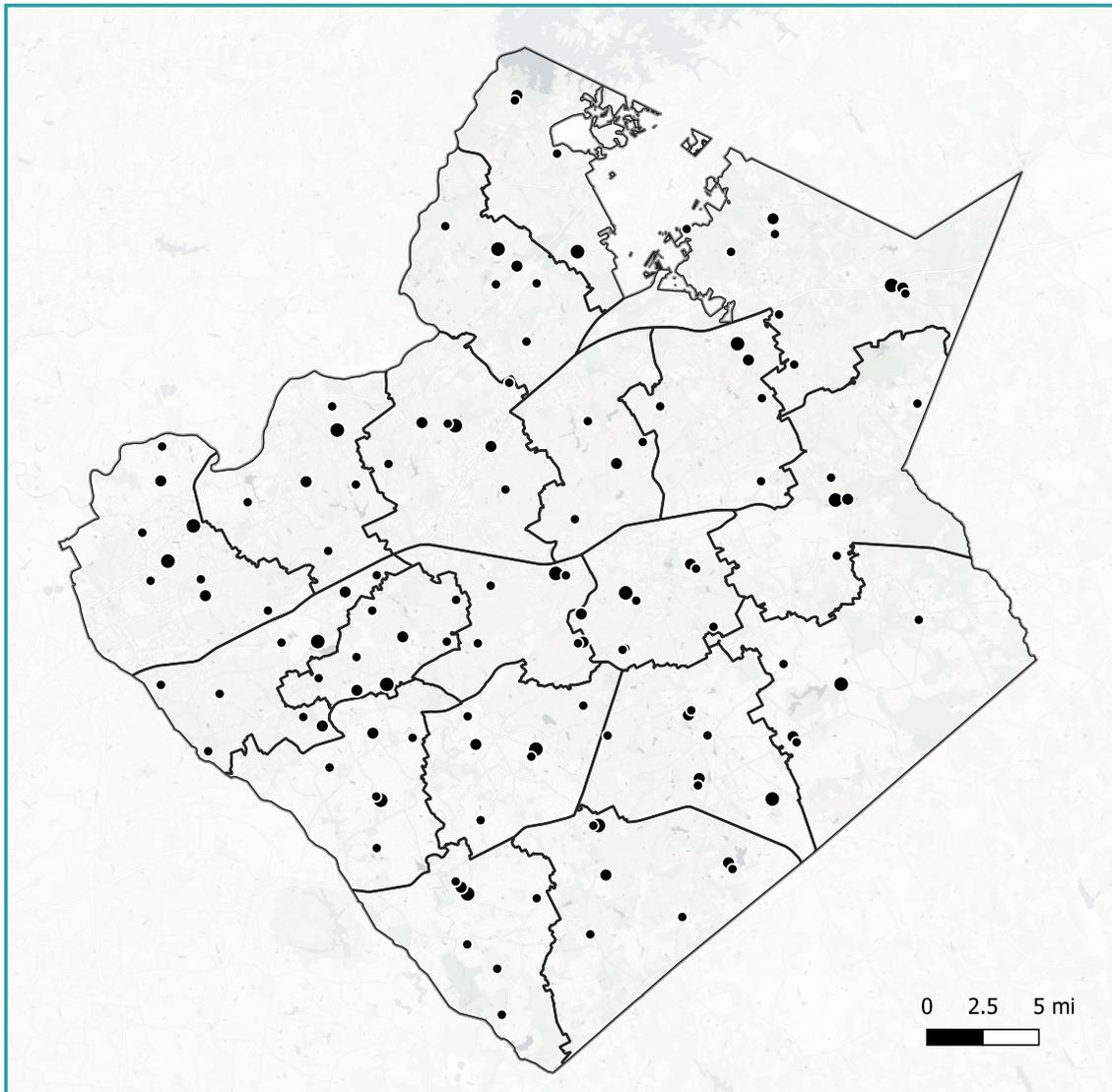
- **Advanced Academic Programs**

Advanced Academic Programs offer academic services to advanced students in grades K-12. They may be housed within a student's base school or off-site at a special facility or within another school. Students go through a screening process to determine their eligibility for such programs.

1 "Fairfax County Public Schools Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted 2016-2021." n.d. FCPS. <https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/LocalPlanGifted2016to2021.pdf>.

2 See: <https://www.fcps.edu/academics/elementary-school-academics/k-6advanced-academics/young-scholars-k-12>.

D. Gwinnett County Public Schools



• Elementary School ● Middle School ● High School □ Cluster Boundary

Figure 3.6 Map of CMS High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	GCPS	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	135	200
Total students	179,266	165,267
Land area (square miles)	416	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	2,135	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	No data available	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	58%	38%

Overview

Gwinnett County Public Schools is the largest school system in Georgia and the 14th largest school district in the country. The first school in Gwinnett County opened in 1826.¹ GCPS encompasses all schools in Gwinnett County, located northeast of Atlanta.

Student Assignment Structure

GCPS uses cluster attendance zones. Unlike MCPS, this means that there are multiple schools to which a student can be assigned based on their home address (as opposed to one base school as in districts like MCPS). In Gwinnett County there are 19 clusters, each containing three to six elementary schools that feed into one or two middle schools, which then feed into one high school (with the exception of one cluster with two high schools). There are also about a dozen schools where attendance is not determined by cluster.²

Policies

According to the GCPS Board approved policies, the Superintendent is responsible for developing and implementing procedures around enrollment and admissions criteria.³ According to local news coverage of past redistricting, some of the criteria GCPS uses for determining school boundaries and boundary changes are: “**current enrollment, enrollment forecasts, enrollment histories, existing identifiable boundaries, school locations, and student transportation.**”⁴

While there is no particular policy guiding boundary changes in GCPS, the Office of Planning reviews school boundaries each year to determine whether there is a need for boundary adjustments—typically related to the opening of a new school and the need to balance school capacity. According to the Office of Planning, all redistricting processes are driven by the public, according to the following process: the principal of any affected school(s) appoints a redistricting committee, consisting of parents, teachers, or other members of the public. This committee oversees the process of developing options, and presents their recommendations to the Board of Education, which makes the ultimate decision(s).

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- 1 Trevor McNaboe. 2018. “PROGRESS: Gwinnett County Public Schools’ Journey from Rural to State’s Largest System.” Gwinnett Daily Post. February 25, 2018. https://www.gwinnettdaily.com/local/progress-gwinnett-county-public-schools-journey-from-rural-to-state/article_eb62bf0e-3881-571e-9c70-72b72d0e623c.html.
 - 2 “2018-19 GCPS Schools by Cluster.” n.d. Gwinnett County Public Schools. <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/wcm/connect/eb268777-69ca-468e-b54a-1208a609522e/2018-19-Schools-by-Cluster.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mI5bmAX>.
 - 3 “GCPS Board Approved Policies.” n.d. Gwinnett County Public Schools. Accessed March 3, 2020. <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/boe/content/policies>.
 - 4 Keith Farner. n.d. “Latest Gwinnett County Schools Redistricting to Affect 6,800 Students, 31 Schools.” Gwinnett Daily Post. Accessed March 3, 2020. https://www.gwinnettdaily.com/local/education/latest-gwinnett-county-schools-redistricting-to-affect-students-schools/article_6424d29e-0537-5e56-844c-77586ae58963.html.

GCPS works with the planning commissions and local officials in Gwinnett County to create rezoning reports related to upcoming residential rezoning and its impact on school zones. Through these reports, the school system documents residential rezoning plans and their possible impacts on school enrollment and makes this information public on their website.¹

History

Between 2015 and 2016, GCPS underwent a series of large redistricting efforts to rebalance attendance areas and accommodate new school openings. This included multiple new school openings, redistricting, and the creation of a new cluster. This redistricting effort changed the school assignment of tens of thousands of students. According to the GCPS Office of Planning, a redistricting process is anticipated to begin in the coming year due to the opening of a new secondary school in 2022.

In 2018, Gwinnett County voters approved a \$350 million General Obligation bond referendum to complete capital projects throughout the county, including a new high school, updated technology, and safety-related improvements.

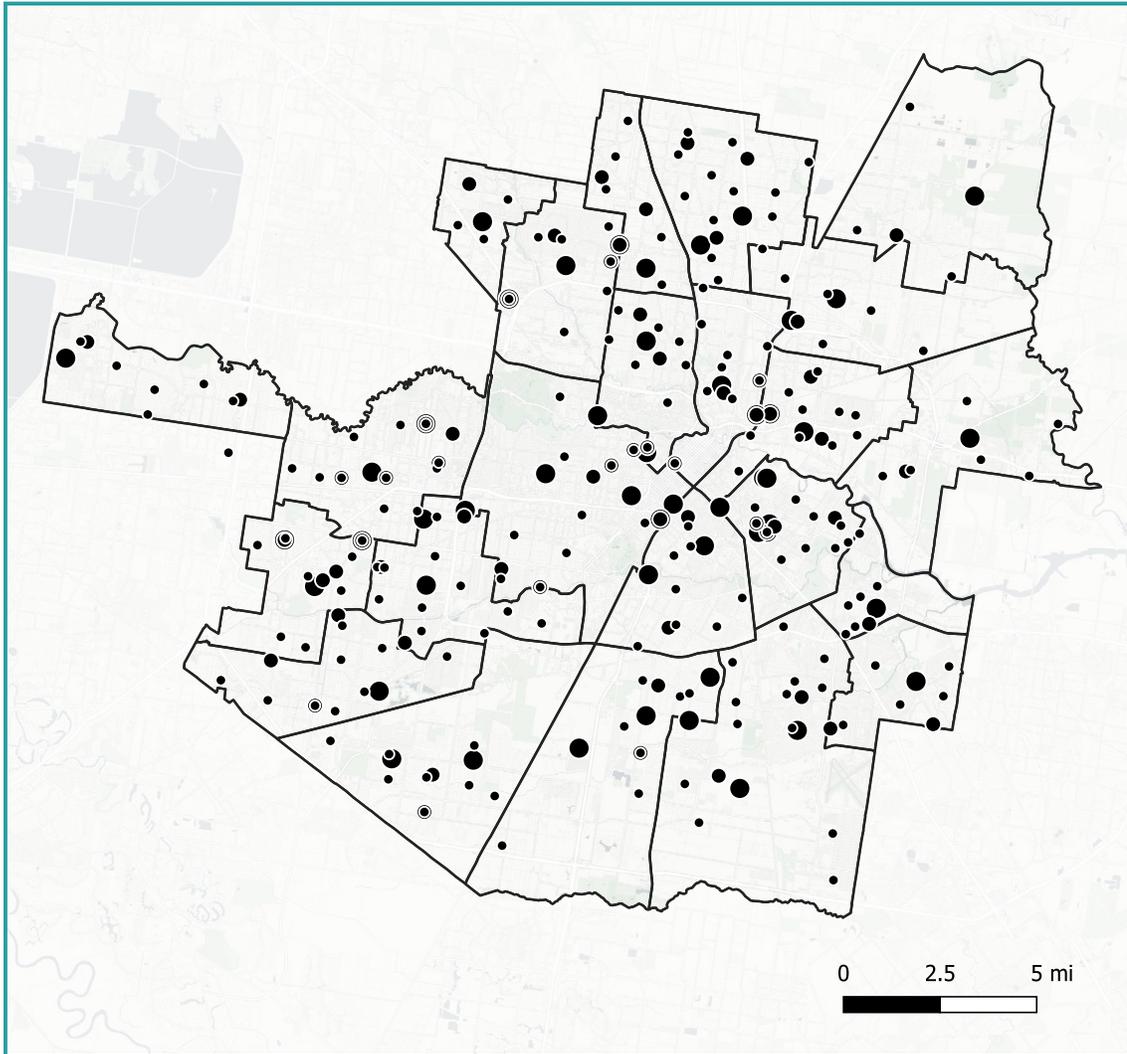
Other notable programs and policies

- **E-SPLOST**

Gwinnett County Public School has a tax policy called the education special purpose local options sales tax (E-SPLOST) that funds education related expenses. Originally started in 1997, E-SPLOST is a one-cent sales tax on all retail sales in Gwinnett County and that revenue can only be used for certain capital programs in the school system. E-SPLOST was successfully extended through 2022.

¹ "Board of Education Data on County Rezoning Requests." n.d. <http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/content/key-initiatives/planning-for-our-future/rezoning-report/rezoning-rpt-content>.

E. Houston Independent School District



• Elementary School • Middle School ● High School □ Cluster Boundary

Figure 3.7 Map of HISD High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	HISD	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	275	200
Total students	214,175	165,267
Land area (square miles)	330	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	4,462	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	84%	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	80%	38%

Overview

Houston Independent School District was founded in 1924. It is the largest school system in Texas and the 7th largest in the country.¹ It is located in southeastern Texas and covers the municipalities of Bellaire, Southside Place, and West University Place, and portions of the municipalities of Houston, Hunters Creek Village, Jacinto City, Missouri City, Pearland, and Piney Point Village.

Student Assignment Structure

HISD uses cluster-based attendance zones to assign students to neighborhood schools.² All attendance zones are contiguous and neighborhood based. HISD also has magnet programs as a way to promote school choice. Some magnet schools are open enrollment, with students getting spots via lottery, while others require auditions or meeting the requirements to be identified as gifted and talented. There are over 100 magnet schools—some of which also have comprehensive education for locally zoned students, and some of which are purely magnet programs, which do not have any students geographically zoned to attend them.

Additionally, through program choice transfers, families living within HISD can apply for their child to be transferred to a school other than their zoned school, so long as the family provides transportation. There are also a handful of schools that are part of the Boundary Option Transfer program. These schools accept students from specific schools outside of their school attendance areas.

Policies

The Houston Independent School District Board of Education is the body that votes on boundary changes.³ A 2015 FAQ sheet explains that the Board of Education was reviewing boundary changes because of overcrowding while maintaining the traditional demographic makeup of the overcrowded schools. According to state law, Texas schools are required to have 22 or fewer students in kindergarten to fourth grade classrooms. If schools are overcrowded, HISD must submit a class-size waiver to the state education agency. In 2015, HISD had to submit 1,500 class-size waivers.⁴

In addition to more standard approaches to address and prevent overcrowding in

1 "General Information / Facts and Figures." n.d. Houston Independent School District. <http://www.houstonisd.org/site/default.aspx?PageID%3D41879>.

2 "How to Enroll." n.d. Houston Independent School District. <http://www.houstonisd.org/site/default.aspx?PageID%3D167912>.

3 "Policy AC: Geographic Boundaries." n.d. Houston Independent School District. [https://pol.tasb.org/Policy/Download/592?filename=AC\(LEGAL\).pdf](https://pol.tasb.org/Policy/Download/592?filename=AC(LEGAL).pdf).

4 "FAQ: Attendance Boundaries." n.d. Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/cms/lib2/TX01001591/Centricity/Domain/32468/021215-Attendance-Boundaries-FAQ-ENG.pdf>.

elementary schools (boundary changes, temporary classrooms, etc.), HISD caps transfers and special programs within schools once utilization reaches 95%. HISD also designates local and regional hubs: these are centers equipped to receive students if schools or particular programs reach capacity. The first tier of support is the local hub, followed by the regional one.¹

History

The Houston school board considered proposals for six boundary changes ahead of the 2015-16 school year and rejected four of them.²

The first magnet school in HISD opened in 1975 to voluntarily racially integrate schools. In April 1997 a lawsuit against HISD seeking to end race-based admissions to magnet schools was filed on behalf of two white applicants to Lanier Middle School who were denied admission because the quota for white students was filled. That year, as a result of this lawsuit, HISD removed the ethnic guidelines to one of their magnet program enrollment policies.

Other notable programs and policies

- **HISD 2012 Bond Program**

In 2012, Houston voters approved of a \$1.89 billion bond for school renovations and construction of 40 schools, and other projects to address infrastructural and programmatic needs. The bond budget was approved by voters. The project is overseen by a Bond Oversight Committee of seven independent citizens and has committed to holding public meetings to gather community input throughout the process.³

- **Local and Regional Hubs**

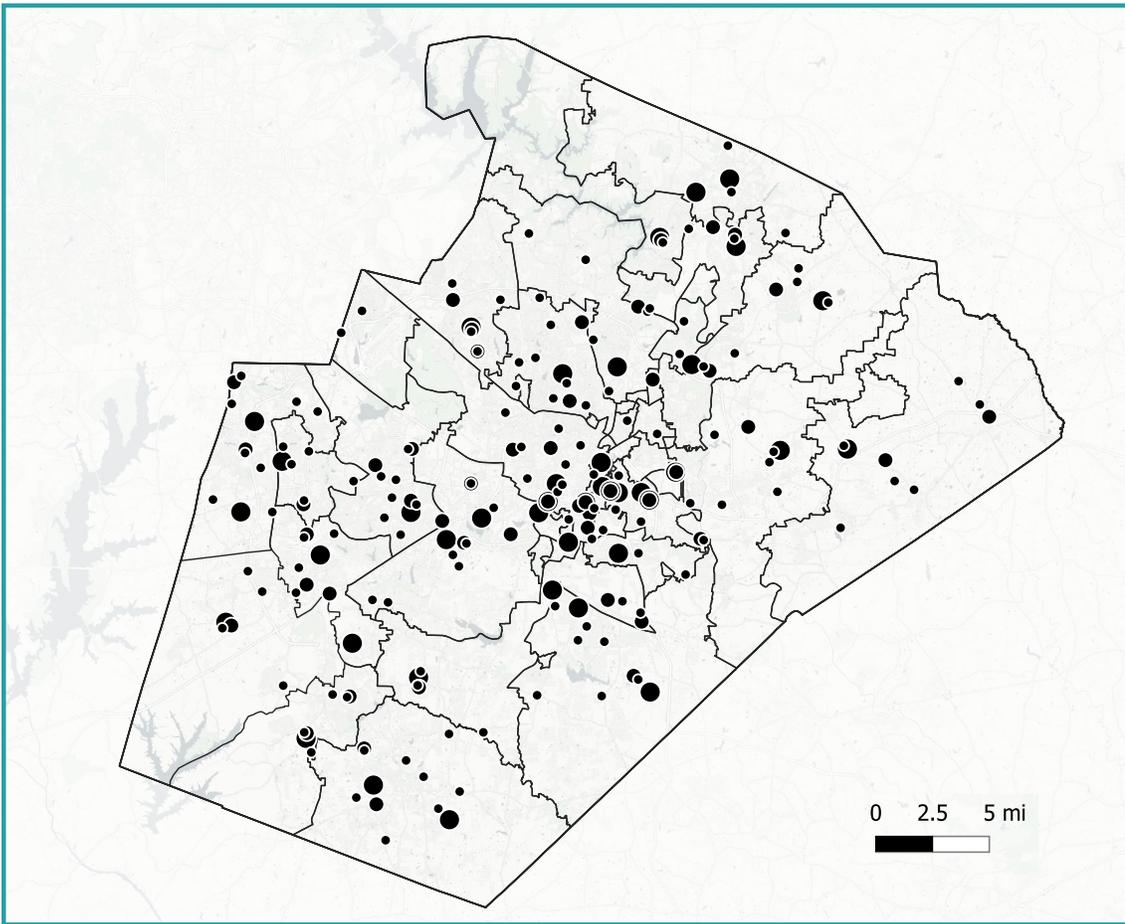
HISD designates local and regional hubs to address capacity challenges. These are centers equipped to receive students if schools or particular programs reach capacity. The local hub is the first tier, followed by the regional hub if the local one exceeds capacity.

1 "Guidelines to Relieve Elementary School Overcrowding" n.d. Houston Independent School District. https://www.houstonisd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=171520&dataid=140216&FileName=FINAL_One_Pager_-_Recommendations_to_Relieve_Overcrowding_-_2018-19.pdf.

2 Mellon, Ericka. 2015. "Split HISD Board Rejects Most Rezoning Plans." Houston Chronicle, May 15, 2015. <https://www.chron.com/news/education/article/Split-HISD-board-rejects-most-rezoning-plans-6264962.php>.

3 Learn more at: <https://www.houstonisd.org/Page/71691>.

F. Wake County Public School System



- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Cluster Boundary

Figure 3.8 Map of WCPSS High School Attendance Areas

Key Statistics	WCPSS	MCPS
Total schools (ES, MS, HS)	183	200
Total students	161,417	165,267
Land area (square miles)	835	493
Population density (persons/square mile)	1,254	2,109
Utilization rate average (elementary schools)	103%*	102%
Free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate (elementary schools)	40%	38%

*WCPSS identifies 100% as the cutoff threshold for target utilization (Source: WCPSS)

Overview

Founded in 1976, WCPSS is the school district for Wake County, North Carolina. At the geographic center of Wake County is Raleigh, North Carolina, the most southeast of three cities that make up the North Carolina Triangle Cities. It is the largest school district in North Carolina and the 16th largest school district in the country.¹

Student Assignment Structure

Student assignment in WCPSS is based on cluster assignments based on home address. Given a student's home address, they are assigned to a base elementary, middle, and high school.² Some schools have enrollment caps because they have reached the maximum number of students they can effectively teach. If a student's base school is a school with an enrollment cap, they will be assigned to an overflow school.³

WCPSS also has 51 magnet schools and 45 year-round schools, which students must apply to attend using ranked choice. The purpose of magnet schools in WCPSS is to reduce high concentrations of poverty, promote student body diversity, maximize use of school facilities, and provide innovative education opportunities. As such, priority is given for these special programs based on the socioeconomic status of a students' base school.⁴

Students are assigned specific bus routes to get to school if they live more than 1.5 miles from the school and attend their base school. Students who are assigned outside of their base school attendance area because of a transfer request are not guaranteed transportation. For magnet students who live outside of their school's geographical area, WCPSS might assign a student to an express stop. Families are responsible for getting students to express stops.

Policies

Changes to student assignment in WCPSS are based on the pillars outlined in "Policy Code: 4150 School Assignments and Transfers" of the Wake County Board of Education Policy Manual. The policy states that changes to student assignment should be based on balancing the goals of **student achievement, stability, proximity, and operational efficiency**. The Board of Education can also take into

1 Grace Chen. 2019. "Wake County Public Schools: History and Overview | PublicSchoolReview. Com." Public School Review. December 30, 2019. <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/wake-county-public-schools-history-and-overview>.

2 "Student Assignment / New Student Enrollment." n.d. <https://www.wcpss.net/student-assignment>

3 "Student Assignment / Enrollment Caps." n.d. WCPSS. <https://www.wcpss.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=33756>

4 "Magnet Schools / Application Process." n.d. Wake County Public Schools. <https://www.wcpss.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=189>.

account **overcrowded schools** in creating new assignment boundaries for school attendance areas.¹To make changes, staff from the Office of Student Assignment conduct analyses about enrollment trends at the request of the BOE. The staff presents the findings back to the BOE, which uses this information to determine how to vote on new assignment policies or new attendance boundaries.

History

Most recently, WCPSS made changes to student assignment in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 student enrollment plans. These updates were mostly based on new school construction, and the reassignment of students from overcrowded schools to newly built ones, but also included efforts to balance utilization at existing schools. In at least one case, this redistricting included the correction of a neighborhood split.

WCPSS began to move toward a neighborhood zone-based school assignment policy-- also called community assignment zones-- after the BOE voted to change school assignment policy to encourage neighborhood zones in 2010.²

From 2010 to 2012, WCPSS used a choice-based student assignment plan. This plan was then replaced with an address-based school assignment policy for the 2013-14 school year.³ ⁴This policy continues to today with some limited options for school choice for year-round schools and magnet schools, where priority for applicants is based on socioeconomics.

Prior to 2010, school assignments were based on intentional integration policies that bused students to schools to ensure socioeconomic and racial diversity in schools (first based on race, and later based on socioeconomics).

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- 1 Wake County Public Schools. n.d. "Policy Code: 4150 School Assignment and Transfers." Board Policy Online. Accessed March 8, 2020. https://boardpolicyonline.com/bl/?b=wake_new#&&hs=194229.
 - 2 Brown, Robbie. 2010. "District May End N.C. Economic Diversity Program." The New York Times, February 27, 2010, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/us/28raleigh.html>.
 - 3 "WCPSS History: Assignment Zones & Choice Plan." n.d. Great Schools in Wake. <https://www.greatschoolsinline.org/wcpss-history-assignment-zones-choice-plan/>.
 - 4 WRAL. 2012. "New Wake Assignment Proposal Combines Choice, Address-Based Models," September 19, 2012. https://www.wral.com/news/education/wake_county_schools/story/11568018/.

Other notable programs and policies

- **Year-Round School**

Wake County Public Schools offers students a year-round school option. There are four tracks for the year round schools with one of the tracks always rotating out on a three-week break. Some families are assigned to year-round schools as their base school, but those who are not can apply to year-round school during the magnet application process. 45 of Wake County's 161 schools have year-round schooling. Year-round schools can accommodate 25% more students, helping WCPSS address utilization challenges in highly populated areas.¹

1 "Magnet Schools /Year-Round Schools." n.d. Wake County Public Schools. <https://www.wcpss.net/Page/38744>.

3.2 Benchmarking Data Analysis

In this section, we offer a general comparison of MCPS to the selected benchmarks, using the lenses of utilization, diversity, and proximity.

Questions:

How does MCPS compare to the benchmark districts in terms of overall school utilization?

How does MCPS compare to the benchmark districts in terms of racial/ethnic and socio-economic diversity?

How do some of the important conditions underlying proximity to schools compare between MCPS and the benchmarks?

Insights:

Utilization

1. As part of benchmarking, we compare the utilization rates across selected districts. MCPS has higher utilization rates, on average, than all benchmarks aside from Charlotte-Mecklenburg.*

The highest utilization rate of any school level across benchmarked districts are middle schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which have an average utilization rate of 114.11%.

Duval County and Houston ISD have considerably lower average utilization rates across all school levels than MCPS and Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Fairfax County and Wake County each have two school levels below 100% utilization, and one school level above.

**Utilization data not available for GCPS*

2. The utilization rates for each benchmark district range by over 50 percentage points between the minimum and maximum school utilization rates at each school level, with the exception of high schools in MCPS.

High schools in each of the other districts range by at least 50% (Fairfax County), with Duval County ranging by 112% at the high school level. High school utilization rates in MCPS range by only 21%.

3. MCPS has a less pronounced range in middle school utilization rates than some benchmarks and is comparable with others.

MCPS has a range of 57% between the minimum and maximum school utilization rates at the middle school level, which is comparable to that of Wake County (54%), but well below Duval County (118%), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (124%), and Houston ISD (a strong outlier at 338%).

Diversity

1. One way to understand socio-economic demographics among the benchmarks is by looking at Free and Reduce-price Lunch (FRL) enrollment. MCPS has a lower FRL rate (referred to as FARMS in MCPS), on average, than all benchmarks other than FCPS.

At the elementary school level, the FRL enrollment rate is highest in Houston ISD (80.41%), while MCPS, Fairfax County, and Wake County have enrollment rates below 40%.

At the high school level, FRL enrollment in MCPS is the second-lowest enrollment rate for any level across all benchmark districts. High schools in Fairfax County have the lowest overall enrollment at 26.89%.

2. At MCPS and all benchmark districts, Free and Reduced-price Lunch enrollment decreases across elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The FRL rate decreases by roughly eight

percentage points from elementary to high school levels in MCPS, compared with an average decrease of 10 percentage points among all of the benchmarks.

3. At the elementary school level in MCPS, Hispanic students represent the plurality (32.3%), followed by White students (26.6%). Hispanic students also make up a plurality or majority in GCPS and HISD.

One way to understand the racial demographics of MCPS and its benchmarks is to look at whether certain groups form a plurality of the student body (or, which racial group is most highly represented in the student body):

- In Gwinnett County, Hispanic students represent the plurality. In Houston, Hispanic students represent the majority at 62.6%.
- White students represent the plurality in Wake and Fairfax Counties.
- Black students represent the plurality in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Duval County.

4. Racial dissimilarity is a form of analysis that can help us understand racial segregation in a school district. In MCPS, the average racial dissimilarity between groups of three closest schools is among the lowest of all benchmarked districts.¹

Dissimilarity is expressed as a value between 0 and 1, where 1 represents higher unevenness. In this benchmarking analysis, we compare the

¹ To learn more about racial dissimilarity and how it is calculated, see the Diversity analysis, page 173.

racial demographics among groups of three closest schools at each benchmark district, by school level. Although measuring dissimilarity between three closest schools is an imperfect measure of segregation, it does represent the evenness of racial groups between different schools.

Racial groups in MCPS tend to be more evenly distributed than all benchmarked districts, aside from Wake County, whose average dissimilarity score is the lowest across all benchmarks:

- Among the benchmarked districts at the ES level, there are three districts that have higher racial dissimilarity scores and one that has a lower score. MCPS has the same score as WCPSS and DCPS.
- For benchmarked districts at the MS level, there are four districts that have higher racial dissimilarity scores and one that has a lower score (WCPSS). MCPS has the same score as GCPS.
- For benchmarked districts at the HS level, there are five districts that have higher racial dissimilarity scores and one that has a lower score (WCPSS). Racial dissimilarity scores are highest at the HS level for MCPS and all but one of the benchmarked districts (CMS).

5. Although the benchmarked districts have relatively low average dissimilarity scores at the scale of the district, we see a different story at the level of individual schools. In each district, there is extreme variation in racial dissimilarity scores between schools.

When we compare the dissimilarity scores of different schools at the same level (i.e. elementary schools compared to elementary schools), racial

dissimilarity ranges widely:

- The minimum dissimilarity value compared to three closest elementary schools in MCPS is 1.9% while the maximum is 42.6%. There is a 40 percentage point difference between the minimum dissimilarity and the maximum dissimilarity at the middle school level, and a 35 percentage point difference at the high school level
- Across all benchmarks, the greatest variation at the elementary school level is 66% in Fairfax.
- Across all benchmarks, the greatest variation at the middle school level is in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, at 67%.
- Across all benchmarks, the greatest variation at the high school level is in Houston, at 68%.

Proximity

1. In this benchmarking analysis, we use the average distance between three closest schools as a proxy measure for proximity. By this measure, MCPS ranks among the lowest of the benchmarked districts at the elementary and middle school levels, but among the highest at the high school level.

Given a lack of access to student-level data for each district, measuring the average distance between three closest schools provides insight into the distance it would take to travel from a school to its nearest neighbors. This is a proxy measure for student travel (presumably, the shorter the distance between schools, the shorter the student trip to school from one of those

attendance areas)

The average distance between three closest elementary schools in MCPS is 1.87 miles.

- Only Houston ISD and Fairfax County have lower average distances at this school level.

At the middle school level, only Houston ISD has a shorter average distance between three closest schools than MCPS.

- In MCPS, the average distance between three closest middle schools is 3.32 miles, as compared to 3.07 miles in HISD.

At the high school level, Wake County is the only benchmarked district with a higher average than MCPS in terms of the distance between three nearest schools.

- Variation in the size of attendance areas in MCPS may play a role in this: the maximum average distance between a school and its three nearest neighbors in MCPS is nearly 11 miles (Poolesville HS).

Benchmarking Table: Utilization, Diversity, and Proximity

To analyze MCPS in relation to the selected benchmark districts, we identified four indicators that could be used to compare utilization, diversity, and proximity among the selected districts: utilization averages, percentage of student body receiving Free and Reduced-price Lunch (FRL), racial dissimilarity, and proximity to schools (the average distance between schools and their three closest schools).¹

These analyses were conducted using available data from benchmark districts, including school boundary maps and student enrollment data. Pending the availability of data sets, there are many opportunities for further inquiry and analysis.

The table below presents a side by side comparison of the benchmarks using the four indicators mentioned above, organized by school level.

¹ Read more about racial dissimilarity in the Diversity analysis, starting on [page 207](#).

	MCPS	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools	Duval County	Fairfax County	Gwinnett County	Houston ISD	Wake County
Utilization*							
ES	102%	107.53%	79%	91.8%	no data	84%	102.6%
MS	97%	114.11%	83%	92.5%	no data	82%	91.8%
HS	103%	111.19%	83%	100.1%	no data	77%	93.3%
Diversity-FRL							
ES	37.91%	67.68%	61.35%	31.96%	57.92%	80.41%	39.70%
MS	34.43%	62.24%	61.68%	30.18%	57.14%	78.43%	38.70%
HS	29.64%	53.87%	42.87%	26.89%	49.16%	73.64%	32.19%
Secondary**		39.59%					36.00%
Diversity-Racial Dissimilarity							
ES	0.15	0.2	0.15	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.15
MS	0.16	0.21	0.21	0.17	0.16	0.19	0.15
HS	0.18	0.19	0.21	0.25	0.21	0.22	0.17
Proximity-Average distance between school and three closest schools (mi)							
ES	1.87	2.64	2.17	1.86	2.9	1.49	2.69
MS	3.32	4.79	4.01	4.38	4.58	3.07	4.25
HS	4.2	3.45	3.83	4.05	5.11	2.56	4.59

Figure 3.9 Benchmarking Table: Utilization, Diversity, and Proximity

*Because we did not have access to school capacity data for Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, utilization statistics for all districts are based on the average utilization rate by school (as opposed to total enrollment divided by total capacity).

**Indicates secondary schools other than high schools.