

Montgomery County Public Schools: Boundary Analysis

What is the purpose of this study?

The Districtwide Boundary Analysis is an initiative designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of Montgomery County Public School boundaries by analyzing various data points such as school facility utilization and capacity, student demographics, and school assignment and travel patterns. The initiative will continue to involve community members from all backgrounds through a variety of forums to fully understand the spectrum of challenges involved in accommodating growing student enrollment and creating more meaningfully integrated and culturally responsive schools within Montgomery County.

Why now?

Over the past twenty years, student enrollment at Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has increased by more than 30,000 students. This growth has helped MCPS become one of the largest and most diverse districts in the nation. Unfortunately, facility construction has not been able to keep pace with this significant growth. The overcapacity of many schools, paired with MCPS' continued focus on equity and excellence, prompted the Board of Education to initiate an assessment of current school boundaries to ensure that MCPS can continue to provide high-quality facilities that support the educational programming needed to reinforce MCPS's core values of **Learning, Relationships, Respect, Excellence, and Equity**.

How is this process related to the recent Clarksburg-Seneca Valley boundary change?

This process is not connected to any current boundary studies or recently adopted boundary actions. This analysis will not make any specific recommendations about boundary changes.

Will this analysis lead to boundary recommendations or changes?

No, this analysis will *not* recommend any boundary options, recommendations, or changes! In each public meeting, the consultant (WXY) will go into more detail on the timeline, scope, and outputs of this analysis.

How will the weighting of the 3 lenses (utilization, diversity, proximity) factor into this analysis?

What is the MCPS Board's approach to weighting these lenses?

The analysis will consider all three of these lenses *equally* and will not prioritize one over the other. Policy FAA outlines the board's objectives related to educational facilities planning. This policy requires that each of four factors (geography, student body demographics, facility utilization, and stability of assignment over time) be included in every review of school and cluster boundaries. **The analysis will**

not reflect individual preferences or weighting. Instead, the analysis will be an objective assessment of data and community inputs that will be used as a resource by the board.

How will this study be analyzing diversity?

This study, when completed, will look at socio-economic as well as demographic and ethnic diversity within the county. The consultants will focus on three indicators representing key diversity impacts: Ever-FARMS (Free and Reduced-price Meals System), race/ethnicity, and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). A major part of these community meetings in this phase of research is to hear from you about other ways that the team should analyze diversity. If not ever-FARMS then what is an accurate measure of socio-economic diversity? The consultant team looks forward to hearing from *you* about what diversity means in MCPS.

Why use Ever-FARMS?

Ever-FARMS is a measure used by the State that captures all students who have ever been eligible for the Free and Reduced Meals program during their time in MCPS. The use of Ever-FARMS as one of the diversity lenses serves as a proxy for poverty that considers those who may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals but, out of fear of social pressures, do not complete the paperwork as well as those who may have moved just above the eligibility line but are still affected by poverty.

How will this study factor in issues of travel time and traffic congestion?

Geographic proximity is one of the four factors in Board Policy FAA, which governs facility use and the boundary process. Bus travel distances and average travel time, walkability to school and other data points will be used in the analysis. However, traffic congestion and density will not be included. Traffic is a multi-factor variable that includes elements like time of departure, means of transportation, roadwork, and more. These variables are not consistently quantifiable across a county of approximately 500 square miles. Therefore, the study focuses on factors that are more fixed and universally applicable, such as the average bus travel time, when analyzing the County through the proximity lens. While traffic won't be a specific lens in the Districtwide Boundary Analysis, travel time is always factored in when actual boundary studies are implemented.

Why is the current scope different from the original proposal?

During the interview process, it was clear from discussion between MCPS and WXY that the WXY proposal needed to be revised to reflect more community engagement. As a result, WXY and MCPS revised the scope to include gathering more community feedback. The revised scope substantially increased the number of area-wide open meetings and prepared for large meeting turnouts. It added 20 meetings with hard-to-reach groups who are at times underrepresented in these open sessions, as well as 40 direct stakeholder conversations. An interactive online presentation is also available on the boundary analysis website, which allows more people to participate outside of these meetings.

Based on WXY's discussions with MCPS immediately following its selection for the project, it was suggested that the WXY scope of work should focus *solely* on data analysis and summary of community engagement, and *not* the development of boundary recommendations. WXY is also committed to the development of an interactive tool for Phase 2 engagement that will allow workshop and focus group attendees to provide direct feedback on the interrelationship among the three lenses (utilization, diversity, proximity). WXY plans to gather as much information, hear as many concerns as possible, and include the full range of community viewpoints in its final report for the board.

What will the final report address?

The final report will aim to accurately and objectively represent existing conditions. This involves taking a deeper dive into the data as well as listening to community's narrative and better understand the core of their concerns. Once completed, this report will serve as **a critical data resource for the board** and will allow them to comprehensively understand county-wide issues that are informed through data as well as community inputs. The final report will not have any recommendations on boundary changes. The final report will consider each of the three lenses *equally*. When considering school utilization issues, the data analysis will establish the corollary impacts to diversity and proximity. Similarly, when diversity is considered, the impacts on utilization and proximity will be considered.

What is the WXY team's experience with school capacity and boundary analyses?

WXY has been working with the School District of Lancaster for the last year on a School Boundary Study, which has included 5 options for new boundaries. This work also included a study of the school capacities. WXY worked with the City of New Rochelle on a school capacity and school enrollment projections study. This study established student multipliers that were used City's environmental review of a new downtown development overlay. WXY worked with Boston Public Schools on a school enrollment projections study and an analysis of new school assignment policies. The analysis considered utilization, distance and demographics.

WXY facilitated the District 15 School Diversity Plan for the NYC Department of Education. WXY conducted data analysis as part of this work which focused on middle schools, including racial dissimilarity analysis and distance from schools.

All of these projects were described in the WXY team submission to MCPS. WXY 's main office is in New York City, and they have an office in Washington, DC. The team, which includes Maryland-based Public Engagement Associates and Transpar, also has significant experience with large-scale engagement workshops and meetings.

WXY is currently starting to facilitate four district-level Diversity Plans in NYC for the Department of Education. WXY has conducted smaller studies for public and private clients to determine student multipliers generated by new development.

Glossary of Terms

Assignment stability: Stability of school assignments over time is one of four factors outlined by Policy FAA to be considered in educational facility planning. MCPS attempts to minimize the number of times the same student(s) are impacted by reassignments leading to changing schools during their time in a particular school level. The policy states: "student reassignments should consider recent boundary or geographic student choice assignment plan changes, and/or school closings and consolidations that may have affected the same students."

Capacity: The number of students who can be accommodated in the building, based on an allocation of space for different grades and types of programs.

Capital Improvements Master Plan (CIP): a six-year master plan for capital improvements in Montgomery County Public Schools. This plan is the mechanism through which the Board of Education requests funding from the County Council and the State of Maryland for county-wide and major planning projects. The most recent CIP plan covers fiscal years 2021-2026 and can be accessed online at:

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/cipmaster.aspx>

Cluster: The geographic grouping of schools within a defined attendance area that includes a high school and the elementary and middle schools which send students to that high school.

Facility Utilization: The total number of students divided by program capacity. Program capacity is

calculated based on available seats, adjusted for optimal utilization. MCPS aims for schools to be utilized between 80-100% of school capacity.

FARMS and Ever-FARMS: The Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) is a federal program to lower or waive the cost of cafeteria lunches in public schools. Students may qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on household size and income. They may also qualify if they are receiving Food Supplement Program or Temporary Cash Assistance benefits. Families must apply every year to determine if they are eligible for FARMS. A wide body of research has shown that FARMS is a good proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school (see National Center for Education Statistics). The FARMS rate is the percentage of students in the county or a given school that are enrolled in FARMS, divided by total students.

The Ever-FARMS rate is a measure of students who are or ever have been enrolled in the FARMS (Free and Reduced-price Meals System) during their time in MCPS, from pre-Kindergarten on. Ever-FARMS provides a more complete picture of socio-economic levels than whether a student is currently FARMS eligible as it accounts for minor changes in need over time, as well as enrollment trends across grade levels.

FAA: Policy FAA is the Educational Facilities Planning policy of the Montgomery County Board of Education first adopted in 1986, and last revised in fall 2018. The policy seeks to establish standards and procedures for long

range educational facilities planning. To this day it governs the Board's planning and decision-making related to school facilities, including school construction, boundary changes, and assignment patterns. FAA establishes the four factors to be considered when developing facility and assignment recommendations, including school boundaries: student demographics, geography, stability of school assignments over

time, and facility utilization. *(Note: No, FAA is not an acronym! All Board of Education policies are titled with a series of letters. Policy FAA falls under "Section F" of MCPS policies, "Facilities Development", sub-section FA, "Facility Development Goals").* Policy FAA can be accessed online at:

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/faa.pdf>.