D. Student Enrollment Trends, Facility Needs, and Planning Priorities

Demographic and Student Enrollment Trends Facility Needs and Planning Priorities Planning and Facility Initiatives 101.3 Form
STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS, FACILITY NEEDS, AND PLANNING PRIORITIES

DEMOGRAPHIC AND STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS

The 2020 United States Census reported substantial growth and demographic change in Baltimore County between 2010 and 2020, with a total population increase of 49,506, from 805,029 to 854,535. Correspondingly, student enrollment in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) has also increased.

After peaking at 134,042 in 1971, BCPS enrollment began a 15-year decline. Since 1986, when enrollment was at 80,630, BCPS student population has followed a twenty-year increasing trend. Most recently, from 2008 to 2019, enrollment increased by 11,395 students (from 103,643 to 115,038) with 11 consecutive years of enrollment increases.

However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment in SY2020 decreased for the first time in 12 years to 111,084 as parents made alternative arrangements for this school year, such as homeschooling, non-public options, prekindergarten (PreK), and kindergarten (K) in response to the pandemic. For SY2021, enrollment remained similar at 111,120.

BCPS consultants and staff have used their best judgement to account for the current and future impact of the pandemic on projected enrollments and estimate enrollment will recover the roughly 4,000 student decrease in enrollment in about three years. Further, BCPS estimates that over the next ten years approximately 7,500 students will be added to the system (the equivalent of eleven new 700-seat elementary schools, six new 1,400-seat middle schools, or five new high schools). Since the most rapid increase between 2020 and 2025 will be in Grades 9 through 12, it is in the high schools that a great deal of new work will need to be concentrated.

The data in this section provides details on historical enrollment trends. These larger, multi-year trends demonstrate how, except for this year’s COVID-19 related decrease, BCPS has experienced consistent increases in total enrollment as well as in student groups that require dedicated space within buildings.
These trends, described in detail at a regional level, are important to understand when planning for future facility needs.

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GROWTH IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT**

The most significant factors contributing to increases in BCPSs enrollments include live births—particularly an increase in birth rates countywide starting in about 2002—and migration and immigration.

As birth-rate continues to be the primary driver of growth, it is appropriate to provide some further background and details here. As the cumulative number of births over a 12-year period constitute the potential enrollment for Grades K through 12 for a specific school year, this cumulative number is more important than any one particular year. As illustrated in Chart 2, by comparing the five-year period prior to 1988 and using the subsequent 13 years, the birth trends mirror the enrollment trends and are then used in understanding future enrollment projections.

Baltimore County’s birth data is consistent with counties throughout Maryland. Births resulting from a secondary baby ‘boomlet’ reached a peak in 1990, exceeding the highest total number of births in the peak year of the post-World War II baby boom. Births then declined from 1990 to around 1997, before peaking again around 2007. Births began to decline again during the Great Recession and have fluctuated since 1.

In addition to the total number of births, the capture rates of those children, or the number of births compared to the number of children enrolled in kindergarten five years later, is an important factor in enrollment numbers. The capture rate in Baltimore County has risen over the past several decades. Therefore, the BCPS enrollment is being affected by an increase in the number of live births, as well as by an increase in the number of those children who then enroll for kindergarten five years later.

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1 Public School Enrollment Projections 2017-2026, Maryland Department of Planning, September 2017
COMPOSITION OF THE STUDENT BODY

As the school age population and enrollment of students has increased, BCPS has transformed over the past 20 years from a predominantly white school system to one that demonstrates a considerable diversity of racial and ethnic minorities. Over these 20 years between 2001 and 2021, student diversity grew by 27 percentage points, from 40 percent to 67 percent (Chart 3). The Hispanic student body represented the largest increase in student diversity, now comprising 12 percent of the total student body. During this period, Hispanic enrollment increased by 13,000 students. Concurrently, all student diversity groups have seen an increase over this period of time.

Since 2017, all five planning regions have seen significant growth in the Hispanic enrollment, with the highest total increase and rate of increase in the Southeast Planning Region, increasing from 13 percent to 21 percent (an increase of 1,793 students) of the region’s student enrollment. The Central Planning Region experienced the smallest increase during the period (654 students).
EDUCATION TRENDS

This change in student demographics has a direct impact on the services and programs BCPS must offer to meet the educational needs of the students. Between 2017 and 2021 there have been significant increases in both the number of students enrolled in the English Speakers of Other Languages Program (ESOL) program and those requiring special education services. Accommodating these growing enrollments creates substantial facility challenges.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

Over the last five years, ELL enrollments increased by 50 percent, from 6,840 to 10,272 students, with the largest increase and rate of growth occurring in the Southeast Planning Region. ELL enrollment in this region increased by 1,081 students, an increase of 101% over the five-year period. These rates correspond to the rates of increase of the Hispanic population, which comprises the largest contingent of ELL students. Just between SY2020 and SY2021, ELL enrollment increased systemwide by 1,465 students, the equivalent of a middle school. As ELL enrollment has continued to increase over the past two years when systemwide enrollment has decreased, the percentage of the student body that is ELL has increased from 7.9 percent in SY19 to 9.2 percent in SY21.
The implication for facility design and construction is the need to provide an adequate number of small spaces for individual or small-group instruction. To ensure supervision of ELL students and their integration with the regular program, these spaces should be adjacent to or even within the regular classroom. While new schools can be designed with such features from the beginning, it is often difficult to identify and construct these spaces in older school facilities; as a result, since regular classrooms are used heavily throughout the day, spaces designed for other purposes must often be called into service for instruction. Corresponding to the availability of such spaces, of course, is the need for adequate staffing for instruction in small-group or even individual formats.

Additionally, as secondary ELL students are provided services at regional centers, the rapidly growing ELL enrollment obviously impacts projected enrollment at these schools. Of the nine ESOL Centers, only two schools are projected to not be over capacity during the next decade. However, it is useful to note that one of these, Sudbrook Magnet Middle School, a total magnet school which projections hold enrollments constant, and the other, Woodlawn High School, has had decreasing enrollment projections for many years while the most recent projections forecast an increase in enrollment. Whether ELL students continue to be served at regional centers or attend home schools, given capacity constraints systemwide at the secondary level, providing services to this student group will be an important consideration for future capital planning.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

In recent years, the number of students receiving special education services has varied dramatically from prior historical trends. From SY2013 to SY2019, special education enrollment increased by 28 percent from 12,548 to 16,087. In the two school years since then, special education enrollment has decreased by nearly 1,200 students (7.2 percent). However, as this corresponds to a decrease in enrollment systemwide, the percentage of BCPS students receiving special education services has not changed significantly (13.9% in SY19 to 13.5% in SY22). As can be seen in Chart 6, this decrease has been experienced throughout the system. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrollment...
practices of families is the most reasonable explanation for the sudden change as the proportion of students receiving special education services to the general student body has remained similar.

This is the most resource-intensive area of instruction, as facilities that accommodate students receiving special education services may involve unique and specialized adaptations to meet the children’s physical and emotional needs. Conventional classrooms in older buildings are often too small and poorly designed to accommodate students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). Like ELL, there is also a need for smaller spaces that support individual or small-group instruction. Older facilities may lack not only appropriate instructional spaces, but the handicap accessibility features that are incorporated into new schools and additions under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

While inclusion of students receiving special education services in the LRE affects the design and capacity of the regular classrooms, several special education programs have unique facility requirements. These include: occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), Social and Emotional Support, and speech language (SL) services. These programs are described in Section B (Educational Provisions).

BCPS is also working to create a continuum of special education services at schools. Doing this will provide an improved level of service to the students and families that rely on these programs. However, to accomplish this, finding classroom space at the elementary school level, where school overcapacity is common throughout the district, has proven a difficult obstacle to overcome. Moving forward, new buildings are being planned with this level of service and appropriate instructional spaces. As capacity is found, the programs are being implemented in existing buildings.