

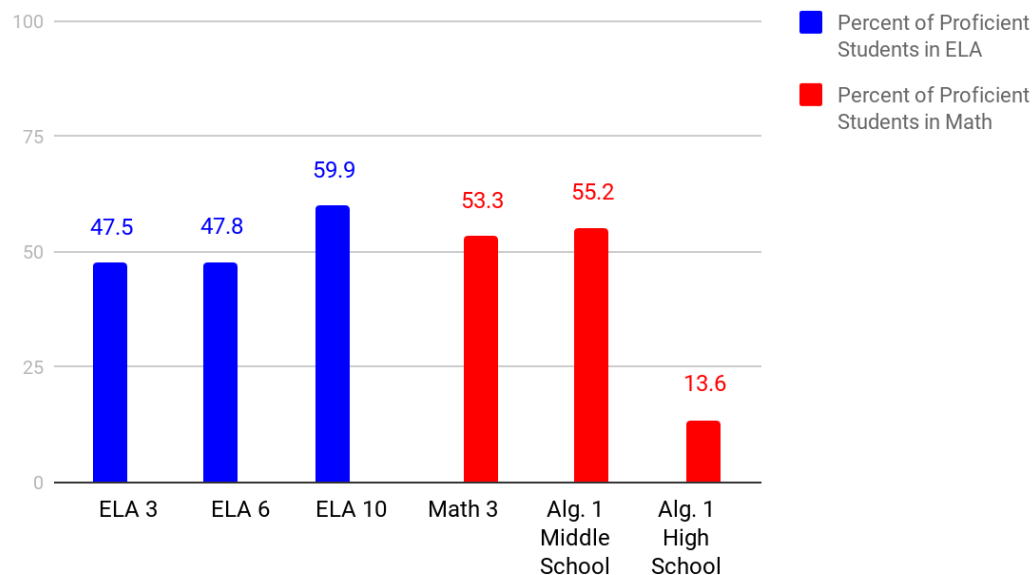
## Strong Schools Maryland – Education Month

“When adults fight, kids lose. ...That’s what we’ve got to resist: throwing stones at one another. And instead, spend our time working together to build the case for doing this for the social and economic future of this state.”

-[Jack Smith](#), Montgomery County Public Schools Superintendent

Superintendent Smith asked Maryland legislators to come together and implement the state’s innovative education reform plan because all students deserve the best education possible. Several years ago, Maryland was ranked as one of the top education systems in the country with Montgomery County considered as among the top school districts in the state. Unfortunately, student academic performance at the state and county levels have steadily declined along with education funding. Maryland commissioned a [study](#) in 2016 to assess this problem and concluded that public schools were underfunded by [\\$2.9 billion](#) annually. Consequently, student performance in English and math drastically fell to [26th](#) in the nation according to the 2017 NAEP, the most significant [decline](#) in the country. According to state level testing, fewer than [40%](#) of Maryland graduates are considered “college and career

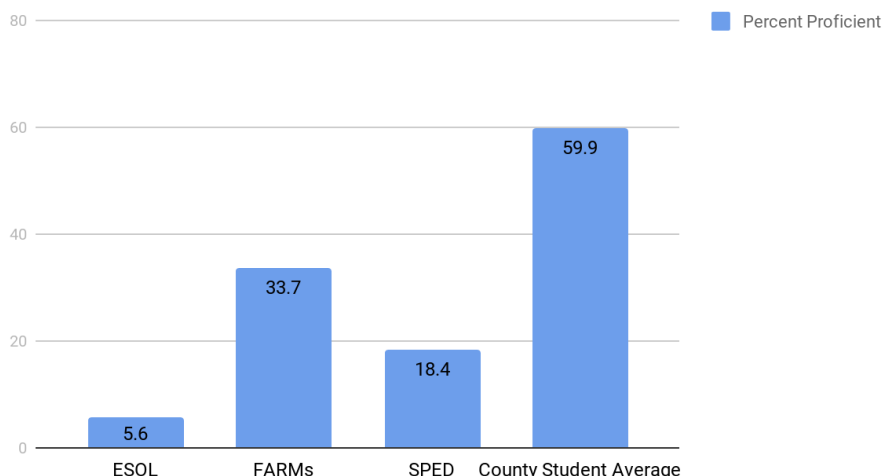
Montgomery County Proficiency Scores



ready.”

Montgomery County has not been exempt from this state-wide trend. The majority of county residents (67%) agree that their schools are underfunded in the most recent [Goucher Poll](#), and [student performance](#) has followed the state-wide funding decrease. According to the most recent [English](#) and [math](#) PARCC test scores, Montgomery County students performed under 60% proficiency at all grade levels. If standard grading practices were applied, both the state of Maryland and Montgomery County would receive failing grades.

## ELA 10 PARCC Proficiency Scores for Special Categories



Students receiving ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages), FARMs (Free and Reduced-price Meals) and special education services performed even lower than the county average. On the 2018 English 10 PARCC, only 5.6% ESOL, 33.7% of students receiving FARMs and 18.4% of students receiving special education services met or exceeded expectations compared to the county average of almost 60%, according to the [MCPS Data Dashboard](#). This gap is likely to grow without strategic investment due to Montgomery County's increasingly diverse ethnic and socio-economic population with [40.7%](#) of children living at or near poverty, and [40.6%](#) of residents speaking a language other than English. Analyzing the same test based on race, 82.7% of White students meet or exceed expectations compared to 43.3% of African American students and 38.6% of Hispanic students in Montgomery County.

This inequity and declining student performance is solvable. Almost 20 years ago, in 2002, the [Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act](#) was passed. This law increased funding to public schools followed by increases in student performance. Due to the recession, state and local funding to schools decreased, diminishing the effectiveness of the Bridge to Excellence plan. This contributed to the low academic performance seen in the state today. Fortunately, Maryland has a strategy to implement aggressive policies and re-fund Maryland schools to place student performance back on top in the nation and the world.

### The Opportunity

In an effort to build a world-class public school system where every child has the opportunity to succeed, Maryland commissioned a team of educators, union leaders, county officials, legislators, advocates and consultants to analyze the common components in the most successful school systems across the country and around the world. Chaired by former University of Maryland Chancellor William Kirwan, the Commission of Innovation and Excellence in Education (Kirwan Commission), compiled a 232 page [report](#), laying out a 10-year blueprint to transform schools, moving Maryland graduates from unprepared to globally competitive. The elements of highly successful school systems are categorized into five policy

initiatives in the report, which address the gaps based on poverty, language and race in Montgomery County.

**1. Early Childhood Education** - Provides high-quality pre-kindergarten for all 4 year olds, low-income 3 year olds and all children with disabilities.

Making sure all children are prepared when they enter Kindergarten is one of the most effective ways to improve equity in school systems. Many families in Montgomery County cannot afford high-quality child care that provides the same level of educational opportunities as expensive pre-kindergarten programs. Montgomery has some of the highest [child care costs](#) in the nation with annual expenses comparable to college tuition, in the \$30,000 range. The Kirwan Commission recommendations will make pre-kindergarten free for families within 300% of the federal poverty rate and subsidizes fees for more child care providers to achieve the same credentialing as teachers in county-based schools.

**2. Ample Supply of High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders** - Provide comparable pay and professional opportunities for teachers in relation to other professions requiring the same amount of education.

Montgomery County Public Schools hired consultants to analyze student access to effective teachers in schools across the county. The [results](#), released in 2019, revealed that students experiencing higher levels of poverty have less experienced teachers. Since teachers with three or less years of experience are proven to be less effective than those with more experience, the analysis used this as a proxy for the highly-qualified status. In a state where over [40%](#) of all first year teachers leave the profession before the end of their fifth year, this inequity is likely to continue unless teachers are offered the rewarding career ladders and adequate compensation the Kirwan Commission recommends. With the initial implementation of the Kirwan recommendations, Montgomery County teachers were already guaranteed a 3% raise for the 2019-2020 school year.

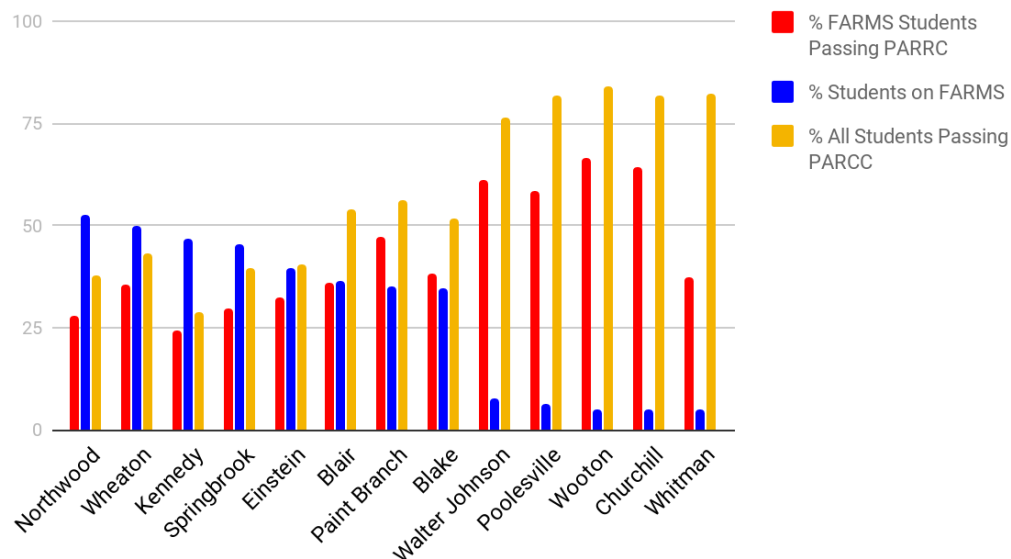
**3. College and Career Readiness** - Expands access to AP and IB programs and allows students to graduate with an Associate's degree or professional certification.

With costs of college rising nationally and the economy changing, a one-size-fits-all education model does not prepare students for the variety of employment opportunities available for today's workforce. MCPS worked with the Education Strategy Group to analyze the impact of these new employment trends on students' post-secondary success. The [study](#) found that two-thirds of all jobs in Montgomery County will require less than a Bachelor's degree, but more than a high school diploma by 2020. The Kirwan Commission report restructures Maryland's education system, so students complete their general high school requirements by tenth grade, in order for students to start earning college credits and/or a professional certificate in the last two years of school. This recommendation reduces the amount of credits and overall cost needed for college and more adequately prepares students for 21st century career opportunities.

**4. Resources to Ensure Success for All Children** - Increase funding for students who are receiving services for limited English proficiency, low-income, and special needs.

Even though the [MCPS Equity Framework](#) states, “outcomes should not be predictable by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status,” they are for Black and Hispanic students and students experiencing poverty. In the Northeast and Down County Consortium high schools, FARMs rates are 41.7%, on average, compared to higher performing upcounty schools with 5% or lower FARMs rates. Higher FARMs rates directly correlated with lower student performance. Consortium high schools have an average pass rate of 36.9% for the English 10 PARCC, compared to an average of 82.7% in the selected Up County high schools displayed in this graph. The largest achievement gap between schools is between Northwood with 52.5% of students receiving FARMs and an overall pass rate of 37.6% compared to Wootton with 5% or less of students receiving FARMs and an overall pass rate of 84.1%. This trend holds true when comparing every high school within the district. As FARMs rates decrease, student performance

ELA10 FARMs Proficiency: Montgomery County Selected Regions



increases.

In addition to poverty, student achievement is also based on race. On average Black and Hispanic students in MCPS [are more than three grade levels behind White students](#) in academic performance. These students are also more likely to be suspended with [46% of Black students and 31% of Hispanic students](#) accounting for MCPS suspensions compared to only 12% of White students. Black and Hispanic students accounted for all of the expulsions in MCPS for the 2015-2016 school year.

The Kirwan recommendations allocate additional, specifically designated, state funding to provide more research based solutions for schools based on different needs, including a full time community schools coordinator and health practitioner for each school with concentrated poverty. These schools will be able to provide the wrap-around services including community services, family support, and behavioral health services needed to close the achievement gap. Due to the 2019 Kirwan kickstarting legislation, Montgomery county will receive funding for [8](#) additional community schools with concentrated poverty.

**5. Governance and Accountability** - Provides oversight from an independent agency to ensure appropriate funding and implementation of recommendations.

As many counties allocate much of their local revenue to education already, it is necessary to make sure this money is being spent on proven best-practices that will move student performance in MCPS from failing to internationally competitive. Montgomery County Councilmember, and the county representative for the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) served on the Kirwan Commission and expressed the need for accountability. He [said](#), "I spent the last two and a half years working on the Kirwan Commission...to advocate for more funding for our schools, so that principals, teachers and support staff can dive into the process of creating true equity for all students. Local jurisdictions relying on state money that is intended for this purpose to instead support day-to-day operations of the school system destroys the fidelity of the Commission's recommendations." \_

### **Call to Action**

In 2019, the Maryland General Assembly unanimously voted to start implementing this plan in the "Blueprint for Maryland's Future" bill [SB1030](#). The Blueprint was funded for a three year grant program, with Montgomery county receiving over \$24 million annually. Now, the complete Kirwan Commission recommendations need permanent funding to fully implement the plan. After a 10 year phase in period, the full funding for the Kirwan Commission recommendations will be \$3.8 billion dollars annually. Considering Maryland schools were already underfunded by \$2.9 billion annually and the state and local governments currently pay a combined ~\$15 billion per year for education, this is not a drastic increase.

Maryland legislators must vote for new revenue sources and allocate them to school funding. Montgomery County Delegate, Jared Solomon (District 18) [argued](#) for this legislative action as well: "For Maryland to move forward, we must fight not for a bigger piece of the pie for ourselves but for a bigger pie for everyone. While we will wait another year before the Kirwan Commission finalizes the new school funding formula, we can all join to fight for our kids today. We owe it to those lives delayed, those potentials put off, to ensure this is the last year of waiting. We can build a world-class education system in Maryland, but we all must do our part."

Montgomery County leaders, activists, and civic organizations are already in support of implementing and funding the Kirwan Recommendations including the [Committee for Montgomery](#), [Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Community Action Board](#), [League of Women Voters](#), [MCEA](#), [Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce](#), and [DotheMostGood](#). Montgomery County residents must join the fight for this once in a generation opportunity to improve education equity, academic performance and college/career readiness for county students. Doing more of the same will continue the steady educational decline, leaving students unprepared for professional success, citizenship, and reaching their full potential.

In a public hearing in March 2019, Delegate Acevero, of Montgomery County, asked Mr. Kirwan about the social costs of not implementing the commission recommendations. He responded

by saying, “It’s not only that there is a cost to the individuals who don’t get the quality education, and the absence of an adequately scaled workforce that should be a concern to everyone, we also need to think about that it’s well known that as education levels rise social costs go down. Healthcare costs go down, incarceration costs, public safety costs go down. Tax revenues go up because people have better jobs.” Delegate Acevero went on to quote the poet Victor Hugo who once said, “He who opens a school door, closes a prison.”

Go to [StrongSchoolsMaryland.org](http://StrongSchoolsMaryland.org) to learn more and get involved in helping ensure the full funding of the Kirwan recommendations and help us make our public schools the best in the nation.

Appendix:  
FARMS v PARCC results by high school

### Montgomery County FARMS English10 PARCC Results by H.S.

