

MCPS Program Analysis: FAQs

MCPS Center Program Model for 2027–2028

Frequently Asked Questions

Background and purpose. Beginning in the 2027–2028 school year, Montgomery County Public Schools will implement a six-region model for high school academic center programs. This FAQ is intended to provide clear, family-facing answers about the regional center program model, program options, admissions, transportation, implementation, and the transition from the current consortium and countywide structures.

The questions are organized by topic so families can quickly find the information most relevant to them.

Section overview

Vision, Rationale, and Goals: Why MCPS moved to a regional model and what the work is designed to accomplish.

Program Structure and Offerings: How the six regions are organized and what program themes and pathways students will see across the county.

Access & Student Experience: What the center program model means for students, including the role of the home high school and the overall student experience.

Admissions, Access, and Logistics: How students apply, how selections work, and general access information such as seats, transportation, and CTE hubs.

Program Quality & Staffing: How MCPS will support consistent quality, rigor, staffing, and ongoing program improvement.

Communication & Family Support: How students and families will receive information, guidance, and multilingual support.

Implementation & Transition: Who is affected, when implementation begins, and how the transition will unfold over time.

NEC and DCC: How the center program model affects the Northeast and Downcounty consortium structures and related processes.

Please visit the High School Center Program Website for additional information and updates:

<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/regional-programs-and-themes/>

Vision, Rationale, and Goals

This section explains why MCPS moved to a regional center program model and what the work is designed to accomplish.

Question	Answer
Overview: What is the goal of the regional model?	The goal of the regional model is to expand access to high-quality high school academic programs across Montgomery County so more students can participate in strong, engaging options closer to home.
Why did MCPS move to a regional model?	MCPS moved to a regional model to address uneven access to specialized programs, reduce barriers created by geography and transportation, increase the

	number of available seats, and build a more consistent system of program opportunities across the county.
Is this work about eliminating strong programs?	No. This work is not about taking away strong programs. It is about building on successful programs and expanding access so more students in more parts of the county can benefit from them.
How will the regional model improve equity?	The regional model improves equity by ensuring that every region has access to high-quality program themes and pathways, rather than concentrating many opportunities in only a few locations.
What does MCPS want students to gain from this model?	MCPS wants students to have more opportunities to explore interests, experience rigorous learning, and prepare for college, careers, and community life through strong local high schools and regional program options.
Is the regional program model a final decision, and can the community still provide input to the Board of Education (BOE)?	On March 26, 2026 the Board of Education approved that MCPS establish the regional model for secondary programs. View resolution here .

Program Structure and Offerings

This section details the six-region structure, program themes, and the status of academic pathways.

Question	Answer
What are the regions that begin in the 2027–2028 school year?	Southern Region: Bethesda Chevy Chase, Montgomery Blair, Walt Whitman, Albert Einstein, and Northwood Eastern Region: James Hubert Blake, Paint Branch, Springbrook, and Sherwood Central South Region: John F. Kennedy, Walter Johnson, Woodward, and Wheaton Central Region: Richard Montgomery, Rockville, Winston Churchill, and Thomas S. Wootton Central North Region: Col. Zadok Magruder, Gaithersburg, Quince Orchard, and Watkins Mill Northern Region: Seneca Valley, Clarksburg, Damascus, Poolesville, and Northwest
What are the regional programs proposed at each high school?	Visit the center program website to see the most up to date information. https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/regional-programs-and-themes/regions/

How were the regional groupings determined?	Regional groupings were developed using geographic proximity, existing school assets and program capacity, and equity considerations so students have access to high-quality opportunities closer to home.
What are the five main program themes?	The five main program themes are Medical Science and Healthcare; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM); International Baccalaureate, Humanities and Languages; Leadership and Public Service; and Visual and Performing Arts, Design and Communication.
Will pathway offerings be exactly the same in every school?	No. The themes are consistent across regions, but specific pathways may vary by school and region based on assets, facilities, program design, and student interest.
What will local high schools continue to offer?	All high schools will continue to offer strong local academic programs and student experiences, including advanced coursework, arts, athletics, clubs, leadership opportunities, career and technical education experiences, and other pathways that support students' interests and goals.
What will happen to current countywide and regional programs?	Current countywide and regional programs will be available to students in their school's region.
Can students still apply to Thomas Edison High School of Technology and Seneca Valley hub programs?	Yes. These hub-based career and technical education opportunities remain part of the overall model and will continue to serve students.
Will expanding programs reduce their rigor?	No. Excellence and equity go hand in hand. Admission criteria, curriculum standards, and accountability measures will remain in place. Expansion means more qualified students gain access—not lowering expectations
Will specialized arts pathways (e.g. dance or choral music) continue at local schools even if the regional hub is elsewhere?	Successful, high-interest and enrolled pathways may continue at local schools.
Will Aviation at Magruder HS be available as a center program?	Yes. The Aviation program will have two tracks and be offered as an interest-based center program.

Access & Student Experience

This section explains what the student experience looks like and how students engage with center programs.

Question	Answer
Are students required to apply to a center program?	No. Most students will attend and thrive in their home high school. Center programs are optional for students who want to go deeper in a particular field or theme.
Do students need to be in a center program to be college, career, or community ready?	No. Students do not need to be in a center program to be successful. MCPS high schools offer strong academics, advanced coursework, extracurricular opportunities, and a wide range of experiences that support student growth and readiness.
What happens if a student is not accepted into a center program?	Students will continue at their home high school, where they will still have access to strong academics, advanced coursework, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities.
Can a student be part of two programs?	Center programs are designed as a sequenced course of study. Students will not participate in two full center programs.
What happens if a student's interests change after starting high school?	Students may have additional opportunities to enter certain pathways after Grade 9, depending on the pathway design and available space. Students can also continue exploring other interests through courses and opportunities at their home high school.
What does a student's experience in a center program include?	Center programs are designed to offer a focused experience over the course of high school. Depending on the program, students may participate in sequenced coursework, related co-curricular experiences, capstone opportunities, college credit, internships, research, performances, exhibitions, competitions, or industry-recognized credentials.

Admissions, Access, and Logistics

This section covers application processes, selections, seats, transportation, and other logistics.

Question	Answer
Will programs be criteria-based or interest-based?	The center program model includes both criteria-based and interest-based programs. Criteria-based programs use specific selection factors, while interest-based programs are open to students who want to pursue that pathway.
What may be considered for criteria-based programs?	Criteria may include grades, assessment data, personal statements, portfolios, auditions, or other pathway-specific measures, depending on the program.
How are interest-based programs selected?	Interest-based programs use a lottery-style selection process. In some cases, course placement considerations may still apply for specific courses such as

	math or world language.
Can students apply to a program outside of their assigned region?	No. Students will apply to programs within the region in which they reside.
How many seats will center programs have?	Seat numbers will vary by program (30 or 60 seats per grade level per program for most) and region, but the goal is to increase overall seats countywide so that more students can participate compared to today. This may expand and contract to address utilization of the school buildings. Seat numbers may vary over time based on student interest, staffing, and facility capacity.
Will transportation be provided?	Yes. Transportation will be provided. Families will receive more information soon.
How will students and families learn about the application process?	Students and families will receive information through school and district communications, central office lead in-person and virtual parent information sessions, school counselors, school staff, district webpages, school open houses, and other outreach efforts.
What is the general admissions timeline?	The general admissions process begins with outreach in September, opens to Grade 8 students in October, closes in November, and releases results in January.
Can students still apply to CTE hubs like Thomas Edison or Seneca Valley?	Yes. These CTE hubs remain available. Thomas Edison High School of Technology serves the southern, eastern, central and central south regions. Seneca Valley serves the central north and northern regions through the upper-county hub structure.

Program Quality & Staffing

This section explains how program quality will be maintained and how programs will be staffed and supported.

Question	Answer
How will MCPS ensure the quality and rigor of the center programs?	MCPS will ensure quality by using a common, rigorous curriculum and standards across all regions, shared expectations, consistent program structures, ongoing professional development for teachers, central office instructional leadership, ongoing collaboration across schools, and continuous monitoring of student outcomes.
How will MCPS know whether the programs are working well?	Program quality will be monitored using academic measures, enrollment, retention, completion, student and family feedback, and third-party validations such as AP, IB, and industry-recognized credentials where applicable.

How will MCPS staff these programs given the teacher shortage?	Programs will phase in gradually, one grade level at a time. This gives MCPS time to recruit staff, build educator expertise, and provide professional learning and implementation support. Staffing will be phased in carefully, aligned to resources, with investment in professional development and recruitment to maintain quality. The goal is to build teacher capacity across the county.
What will happen to teachers and staff?	Teachers and staff are central to this work. As center programs phase in, MCPS will follow established staffing processes and requirements to ensure center programs are staffed based on student interest, educator expertise, and enrollment needs. Some teachers may remain at their current schools; others may have opportunities to help launch new center programs . All staff will receive professional learning and support to maintain program quality and ensure smooth transitions.
How will schools determine staffing allocations for center programs?	Staffing is based on enrollment. Courses offered at a school is based on student interest but staffing is school wide and based on enrollment. At this time we have no special program staffing for instruction.
How will MCPS support consistency across the six regions?	MCPS will support consistency through shared program expectations, central office coordination, pathway development, professional learning, and ongoing monitoring of student experiences and outcomes.
How will the success of the regional center program model be measured?	MCPS will track participation, completion, diversity of enrollment, achievement outcomes, and postsecondary readiness . Family and student feedback will guide adjustments.
How will students with disabilities be supported?	Students with IEPs and other needs will continue to receive accommodations and supports , with staff trained to ensure access to rigorous opportunities.
How will EML students be supported?	EML students will receive support from EML teachers and classroom teachers. They will continue to receive services and resources as required.

Communication & Family Support

This section explains how students and families will receive information and support.

Question	Answer
How will students learn about their options?	Students will learn about their options through middle school counselors, school staff, school-day presentations, and exploration opportunities.
How will families learn about their student's options?	Families will receive information through school communications, district communications, webpages, information sessions, outreach events, and other family-facing resources.
Will information be available in multiple languages?	Yes. MCPS will provide multilingual outreach and translated resources to help families access information and understand their options.

How will MCPS make sure access to information is consistent across communities?	MCPS is using multiple communication channels and school-based supports so students and families across the county receive clearer, more consistent information about options, timelines, and next steps.
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Implementation & Transition

This section explains who is affected, when implementation begins, and how the transition will occur.

Question	Answer
When does the regional center program model begin?	The model begins with the 2027–2028 school year.
Who will be the first students to apply under the regional center program model?	Students who are in Grade 8 during the 2026–2027 school year will be the first students to apply to center programs under the new model.
Who is the first cohort to experience the new model in high school?	Students who are in Grade 7 during the 2025–2026 school year will be the first cohort to enter Grade 9 in 2027–2028 under the regional center program model.
Will current students already in existing programs be able to finish them?	Yes. Students who began a centrally managed magnet, regional, countywide, or consortium-based high school sequence before implementation will be able to complete that sequence.
How long will implementation take?	The regional center program model will phase in one grade level each year over four years beginning in 2027–2028 with full implementation in 2030–2031.
How will current students be affected?	Current students will continue their existing centrally-managed programs and pathways without interruption. Students already enrolled in magnet, regional, or countywide programs will be able to complete their programs through graduation. As programs expand, each school will continue to strengthen local course offerings so that all students—regardless of region—have access to rigorous academic options and advanced pathways.
How does this proposal affect current 8th graders (Class of 2030) applying to or entering high school this year?	Current 8th graders (Class of 2030) would not be affected by the proposed changes. They would follow the current system, including application/assignment to existing countywide magnets and consortia schools, and would continue in their program until graduation in 2030.

NEC and DCC

This section addresses questions specific to the Northeast and Downcounty consortium areas.

Question	Answer
What happens to the Northeast Consortium and the Downcounty Consortium under the regional center program model?	The Northeast Consortium and the Downcounty Consortium transition to the six-region model. Students in those areas will attend their home high school and may apply to center programs within their assigned region.
Will the School Choice Process continue in NEC and DCC?	No. The School Choice Process phases out under the regional center program model.
Why is MCPS moving away from the consortium structure?	MCPS is moving to a six region structure so all students, not only students in selected consortium areas, have choice and equitable opportunities to access program themes within their region.