

Washington County, MD
Cradle to Career
Readiness Report



2025 - 2026





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Building Washington County's Workforce for the Future

A Community Progress Report on Educational Attainment

Alan Mullendore, Chair, GHC Education Forum

In 2015, the Greater Hagerstown Committee's Education Forum convened a countywide education summit to examine Washington County's long-term educational attainment and workforce needs. At that time, national research from the Lumina Foundation projected that by 2025, 55 percent of jobs would require at least two years of postsecondary education or training. Yet only about half of Washington County's workforce met that standard, signaling a clear need for coordinated, community-wide action.

In response, dozens of public, private, and nonprofit partners launched the OnTrack Washington County initiative to align education and workforce efforts from cradle to career. Over the following decade, this collaboration produced measurable progress. Kindergarten readiness improved significantly, and participation in dual enrollment programs grew to among the highest levels in the state—demonstrating the impact of shared goals, data-driven strategies, and sustained partnership.

At the same time, the data highlighted emerging challenges. Attendance and graduation rates declined following the COVID-19 pandemic, threatening long-term workforce readiness. Compounding these concerns, rapid advancements in technology and artificial intelligence are reshaping the labor market. New national research indicates that **by 2035, nearly 72 percent of jobs will require at least two years of postsecondary education or training**, raising the stakes for communities

seeking to attract and retain quality jobs that support a middle-class standard of living.

Despite early success, OnTrack Washington County became dormant in 2021 due to funding, staffing, and pandemic-related disruptions. However, the need for countywide collaboration has only grown. Recognizing this, the GHC Education Forum reconvened stakeholders, leveraged remaining OnTrack funds, and secured local sponsorships to produce this report and host a renewed Education Summit, restarting a community-wide conversation about where we stand and what must happen next.

This report provides a data-informed snapshot of Washington County's progress toward its educational attainment goals and identifies key gaps that require collective action. While we should be proud of the gains made over the past decade, the evolving economy demands renewed urgency, alignment, and investment.

As you review this report, we encourage elected leaders, funders, educators, employers, and community partners to identify where your leadership and resources can make the greatest impact. Over the next three years, we plan to convene annual summits to track progress, refine strategies, and more effectively target limited resources. Preparing Washington County's workforce for the jobs of tomorrow is essential to ensuring economic competitiveness, family stability, and long-term community prosperity.



GHC EDUCATION FORUM



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Beyond the Diploma: WHAT TODAY'S JOBS REALLY REQUIRE



A few generations ago, a high school diploma and a steady job in a local factory or small business offered a clear path to stability. Families could buy homes, raise children on one income, and count on reliable middle-class wages. That was true in Washington County as much as anywhere.

Today, that equation has changed. Many of the jobs that once sustained families have evolved or disappeared, shaped by automation, globalization, and a shift to a knowledge-based economy. **With the cost of living rising faster than wages, earning a living wage now depends increasingly on education and training beyond high school.** National trends are unmistakable: most new jobs in the coming decade will require post-secondary education ranging from technical certificates to associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees.

About one-third of these jobs will be “middle-skill” roles that require more than high school but less than a four-year degree, often in high-demand fields like healthcare, manufacturing, and the skilled trades. Washington County's data reflect similar shifts, and **our economic future depends on preparing learners for this new reality.** ^[1]

This transformation is both a challenge and a call to action. **If we want every young person to thrive and earn a secure, family-sustaining wage, we must provide clear and well-supported pathways to postsecondary opportunities.** The pages that follow show where we stand in educational attainment, workforce readiness, and wage outcomes—and where collective, strategic action can help close the gaps.

Living Wage

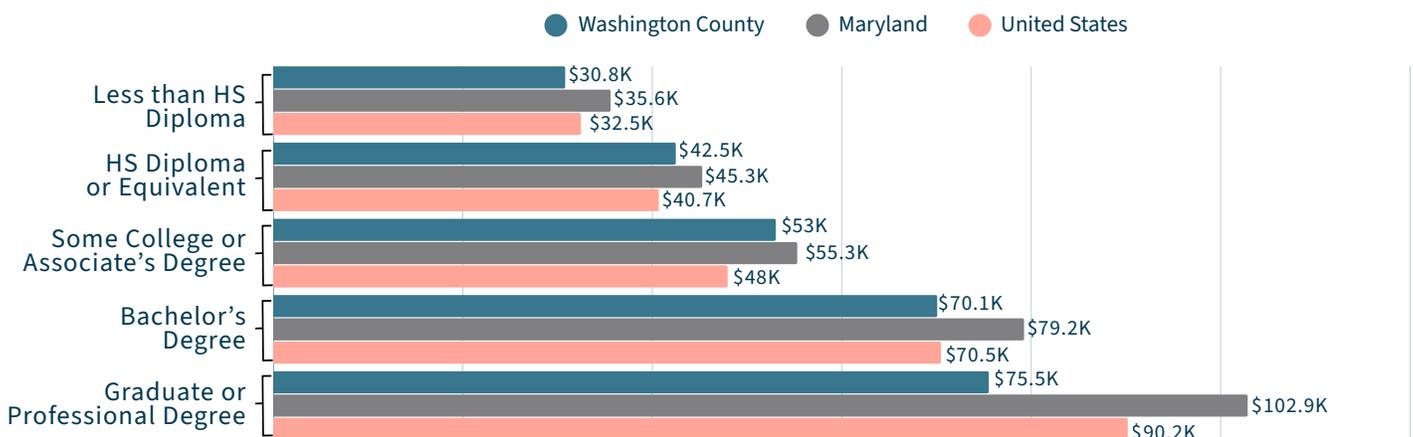
Minimum income a family or individual requires to cover basic needs like housing, food, transportation, and childcare **without public assistance or other government benefits**

The Case for Post-Secondary Education and Training

Education has become one of the strongest predictors of financial stability. National data show a clear pattern: the more education or training a person achieves after high school, the more they earn and the more secure their job. On average, people with an associate's degree make about \$10,000 more each year than those with only a high school diploma, ^[2] and their chances of being unemployed are roughly half as high. In short, education doesn't just help people get a job—it helps them build a career and a future they can count on.

MEDIAN EARNINGS BY EDUCATION

[3,4,5]





Beyond the Diploma

The Local Context: Washington County's Living Wage Reality

In Washington County, these national trends are deeply relevant. A living wage—defined as the minimum income required to cover basic needs like housing, food, transportation, and childcare without public assistance—currently exceeds both the state-mandated minimum wage (\$15/hour) and what many local jobs pay.

According to regional data, **a single adult in the county must earn over \$20 per hour (or nearly \$43,000 annually) to meet this threshold**; for a family with children, the requirement is substantially higher. Yet median wages for workers without post-secondary credentials remain well below that line.

In short, residents without a two-year degree or equivalent certification often struggle to make ends meet—even when employed full time.

This correlation between education and earning potential shows both the challenge and the opportunity in front of us. **Our community's future depends on helping more residents gain the skills and credentials that lead to long-term, family-supporting careers.**

At the same time, local employers need a strong pipeline of trained workers in the industries that keep our economy moving—manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, construction, and technology. When education and employment are aligned, everyone benefits: businesses grow, families thrive, and Washington County becomes a place where every resident can build a stable, rewarding career.

LIVING WAGE BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE [6]

Household Size	Living Wage	
	Hourly (per working individual)	Yearly (per household)
1 Adult	0 Children	\$20.41 / \$42,453
	1 Child	\$36.49 / \$75,899
	2 Children	\$45.51 / \$94,661
	3 Children	\$58.27 / \$121,202
2 Adults (1 working)	0 Children	\$29.07 / \$60,466
	1 Child	\$35.86 / \$74,589
	2 Children	\$39.40 / \$81,952
	3 Children	\$45.65 / \$94,952
2 Adults (both working)	0 Children	\$14.52 / \$60,505
	1 Child	\$20.70 / \$85,496
	2 Children	\$25.27 / \$105,053
	3 Children	\$30.60 / \$127,238

Beyond the Diploma

Our Approach: Cradle-To-Career Readiness

In Washington County, earning a living wage almost always requires education or training beyond high school—whether that’s a **two-year degree, an apprenticeship, or a technical credential**. Helping every young person reach that goal takes all of us: families, schools, employers, and community partners working together from early childhood through adulthood. While no single initiative can close the wage and skill gap overnight, this framework allows us to focus on the levers within our control—the actions most likely to create meaningful, measurable progress toward a future where every resident has a clear, supported pathway to a living-wage career.

Our vision is clear:

Every Washington County resident should have a clear, attainable path to a living-wage career.

To do this, we must build:

Awareness and Aspiration

Residents know which careers in our county offer a living wage, understand the steps required to reach them, and feel motivated to pursue the post-secondary education and training those careers demand.



Access and Navigation Support

Our community ensures students are guided, supported, and actively connected to the resources they need to navigate their path toward a living-wage career.

Readiness and Foundational Skills

Our residents have the academic and life skills required to achieve a living-wage career.



Ability to Persist

Our community provides sustained support from cradle to career that motivates students to stay engaged, overcome barriers, and persevere in their education and training.

Financing and Affordability

Our residents can afford the post-secondary credentials needed for living-wage careers, supported by clear financial guidance, cost-reducing options, and funding that removes financial barriers to completion.



Credential-to-Career Connections

Secondary and post-secondary education and training opportunities in our community are clearly aligned to living-wage careers.

What Now?

This report paints a picture of where Washington County stands today on key educational and workforce indicators, celebrating our successes and laying the groundwork for community leaders and organizations to make data-driven decisions around which levers to pull. In the following pages, we’ll provide up-to-date insights on our community’s strengths and challenges, explore disparities in access and outcomes, and identify opportunities for collaboration.

WORKFORCE LANDSCAPE OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

The changing nature of work demands a new approach to how we prepare students—not just to graduate high school, but to thrive in the careers that drive our regional economy. Washington County’s education and workforce systems must move in sync, helping students build the skills, interests, and qualifications that lead to opportunity right here at home. By connecting what students learn in classrooms to the jobs shaping our region’s future, we can ensure that every young person sees a clear path from education to employment. Understanding the current workforce landscape is the first step in that process.

The Future of Work

By 2031, an estimated 72% of U.S. jobs will require education or training beyond high school, making post-secondary credentials essential for workforce participation and economic mobility. This reality is already evident in Washington County’s fastest-growing industries. **Local job growth has been strongest** in the fields of **transportation and warehousing, professional and technical services, and construction, while health care remains the county’s largest employer.** Across these sectors, most living-wage roles require more than a high school diploma—ranging from industry certifications and apprenticeships to associate and bachelor’s degrees—to meet regulatory standards, operate advanced technologies, or provide specialized services.

To meet this demand, Washington County must better align its cradle-to-career pipeline with labor market needs by exposing students early to high-growth/high-wage careers; expanding career and technical education (CTE) and trade programs in fields such as **construction and health care**; and strengthening partnerships across local education institutions (including Washington County Public Schools, Hagerstown Community College, the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown) and local employers. Stronger education-industry alignment will help more residents earn the 2- and 4-year credentials required for family-sustaining work while supporting the county’s long-term economic growth.

Washington County’s Sector Growth [7]			
Between 2013 and 2023			
Sector	2013	2023	Change
Transportation & Warehousing	5.6%	7%	1.4%
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	5.9%	7%	1.1%
Construction	7.6%	8.6%	1%
Public Administration	7.3%	8%	0.7%
Utilities	0.8%	1.4%	0.6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	13.3%	13.8%	0.5%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	0%	0.3%	0.3%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1.3%	1.6%	0.3%
Educational Services	8%	8.2%	0.2%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	1%	1.2%	0.2%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	1.4%	1.6%	0.2%
Waste Management Services	4.1%	4.1%	0%
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	0.2%	0.1%	-0.1%
Other Services, Except Public Administration	4.6%	4.5%	-0.1%
Information	2%	1.8%	-0.2%
Wholesale Trade	2.7%	2.4%	-0.3%
Accommodation & Food Services	6.2%	5.4%	-0.8%
Retail Trade	13.4%	12.3%	-1.1%
Manufacturing	8.6%	7.1%	-1.5%
Finance & Insurance	6.1%	3.7%	-2.4%



Workforce Landscape of Washington County

Top Employers in Washington County

Understanding the future of work also means understanding which employers drive our local economy today. The following list highlights Washington County’s 15 largest employers—organizations that anchor current job opportunities and signal where future workforce needs will likely continue to grow.

Washington County’s Top 14 Employers in 2025 ^[8]			
Employer	# Jobs	Sector	Difference (from 2020)
Meritus Health	4,400	Healthcare	1,660
Washington County Public Schools	3,705	Education	605
FedEx Ground	2,654	Transportation/Logistics	1,754
State of Maryland	1,855	Government	1,855
Volvo Group	1,836	Manufacturing	536
Washington County Government	1,418	Government	66
Amazon (<i>arrived 2021</i>)	1,200	Transportation/Logistics	1,200
FiServ (<i>formerly First Data</i>)	993	Financial Services	-1,192
The Bowman Group	861	Real Estate Development	116
Hagerstown Community College	700	Education	235
AC&T Co.	608	Petroleum	*
Walmart	565	Retail	*
ARC of Washington County	552	Social Services	*
Moore RMG	545	Business Services	0

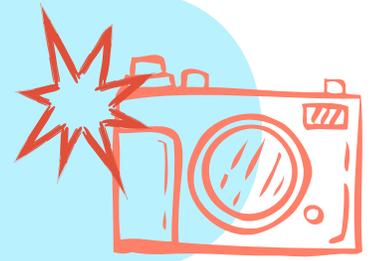
* Not on the 2020 top 15 Employer List

Employer Highlight: The Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine

The new Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine—Maryland’s first new medical school in over a century—brings major opportunity to Washington County. Affiliated with Meritus Health, MSOM expands local access to medical education, offers region-focused scholarships and forgivable loans, and helps address the region’s physician shortage by training and retaining talent locally. Its pathway programs, jobs, and economic impact create a powerful anchor within our cradle-to-career ecosystem, showing students they can pursue high-value, living-wage medical careers without leaving the region.



Community Snapshot: WASHINGTON COUNTY BY THE NUMBERS



Washington County is growing and changing more quickly than in previous decades. Since the last census, our **county has grown faster than the national average and has become increasingly diverse**, bringing new strengths, perspectives, and opportunities to the region. With median individual earnings sitting in the middle of Maryland's counties and comparable to national averages, Washington County reflects both the promise and the pressures of a community in transition.

WASHINGTON COUNTY: POPULATION 157,228

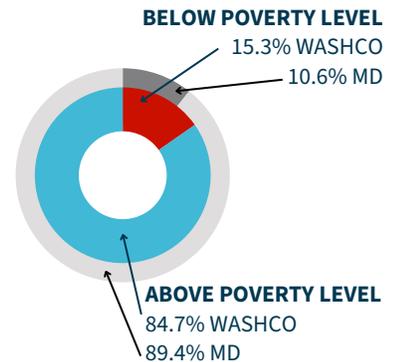
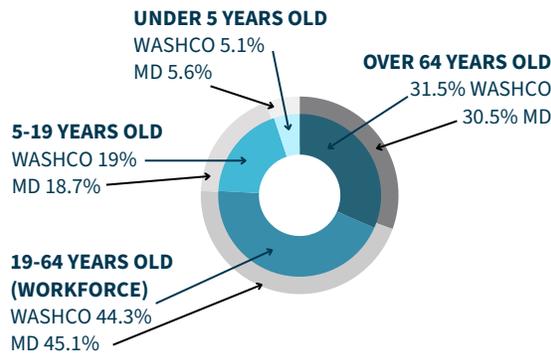
Median **Individual** Earnings: **\$52,004**
Median **Household** Income: **\$74,157**

POPULATION BY AGE ^[9]

CHILD POVERTY STATUS ^[11]

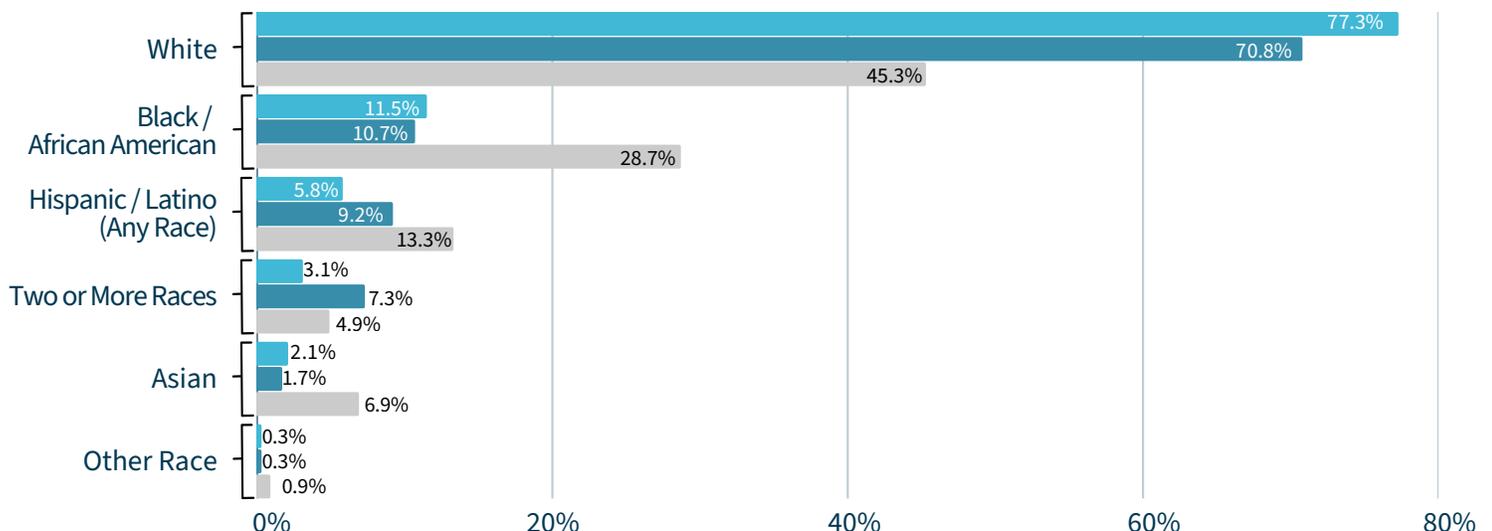
POPULATION GROWTH ^[9]

	2020 Pop	2024 Pop	Change
WASHCO	150.6K	157.2K	4.4%
Maryland	6.03M	6.26M	3.7%
US	326.6M	340.1M	4.1%



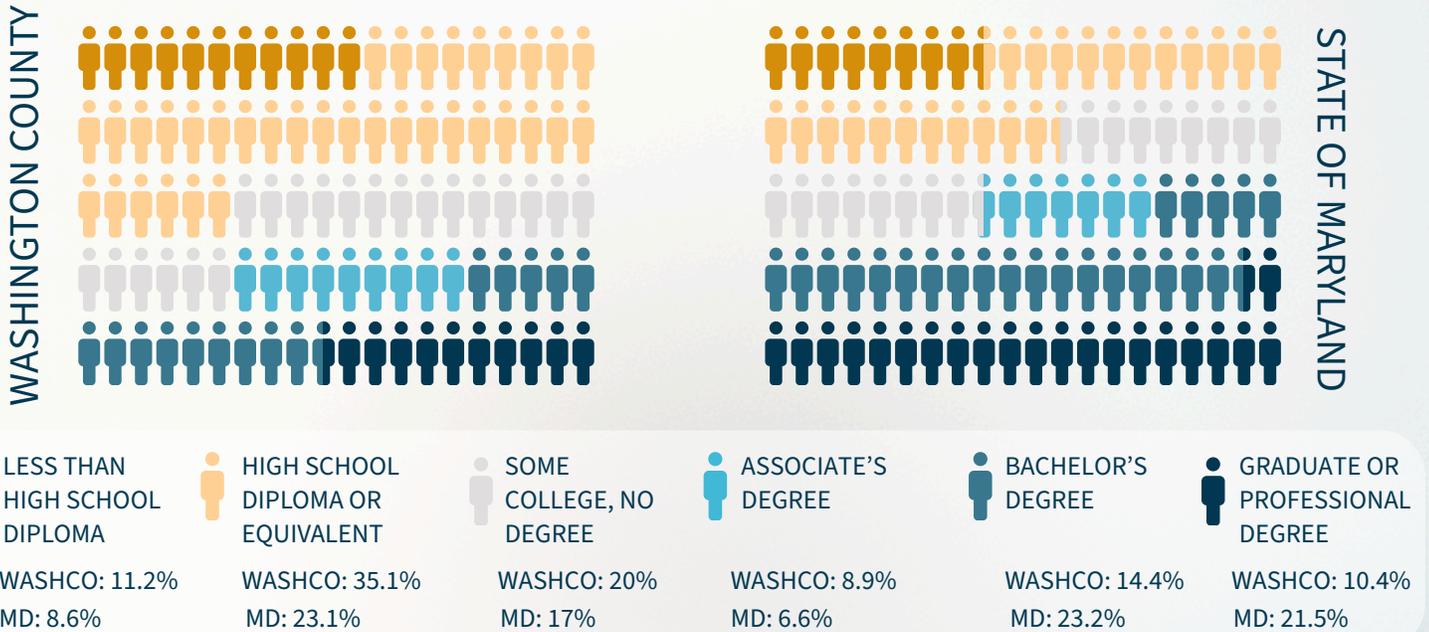
POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY ^[9,10]

● Washington County (2019) ● Washington County (2024) ● Maryland (2024)



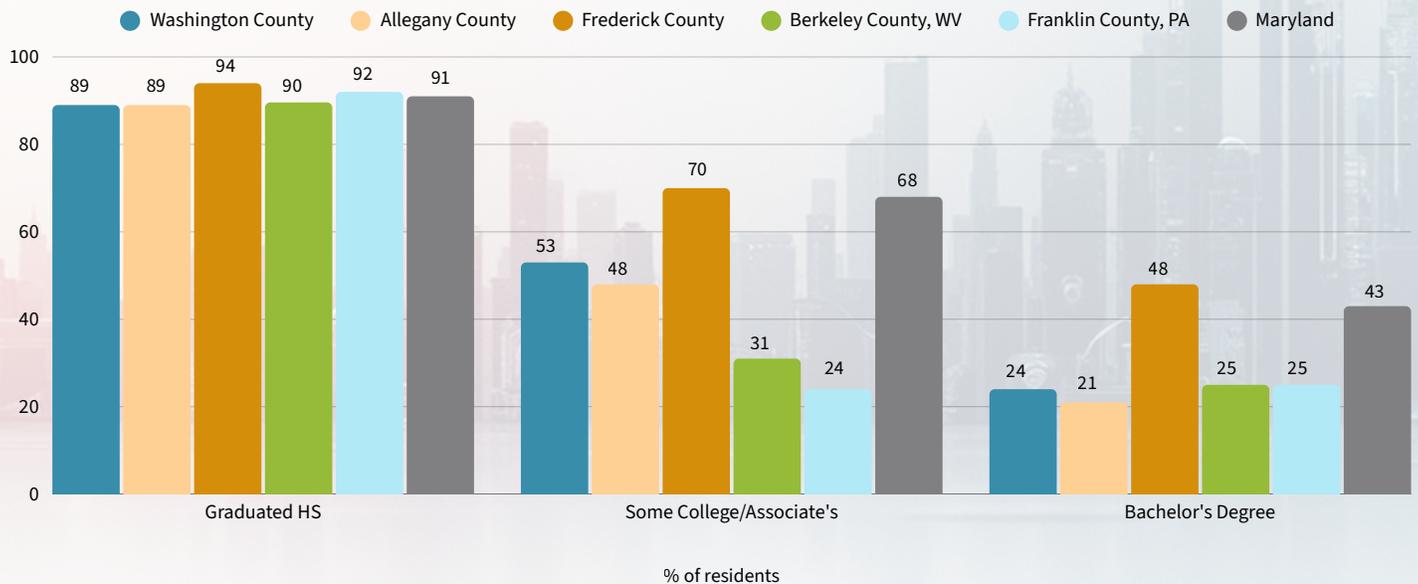
Community Snapshot

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL ACHIEVED IN WASHINGTON COUNTY AND MARYLAND (POPULATION AGES 25 AND OVER) [3]



Far fewer people in Washington County earn an associate's degree or higher compared to the state of Maryland (33.7% vs. 51.3%). **Ensuring that every resident can earn a living wage requires that we increase the number of residents earning post-secondary degrees and technical certifications.**

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT BY COUNTY [3]



Community Snapshot

Youth Disconnection: A Critical Signal for Our Community

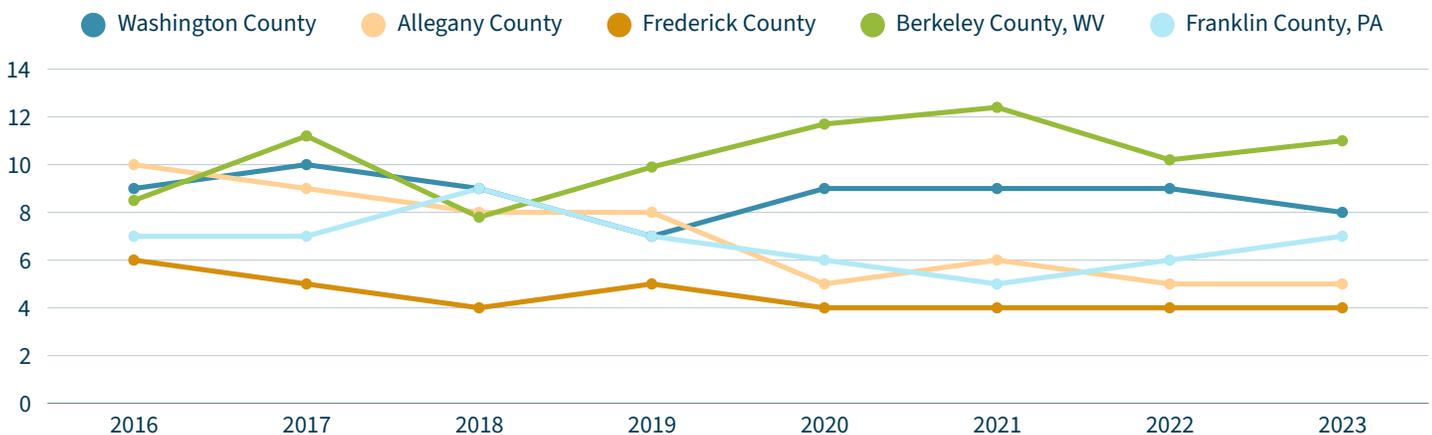
Youth disconnection—defined as the share of 16 to 24-year-olds who are neither in school nor working—is a key indicator of how well a community supports young people during the transition to adulthood. When young adults are disconnected, they face greater barriers to employment, stable earnings, and long-term economic security. For Washington County, this measure offers an essential lens on where our systems are struggling to keep young people engaged and on track.

Youth Disconnection
% of young adults aged 16-24
who do not attend school or
hold a job

As we examine our broader data on demographics, income, and educational attainment, youth disconnection adds another dimension to the story. It helps pinpoint where targeted support, re-engagement strategies, and stronger pathways to college, training, and work are most needed. By understanding where young people are falling through the cracks, we can better ensure that all youth, regardless of their background, have a clear route to meaningful careers and a living-wage future.

YOUTH DISCONNECTION BY COUNTY

[12]



A Counterpoint: Community Supports

Current research consistently points to a common set of strategies that **reduce the risk of youth disconnection** and **improve long-term outcomes**. These include:

- Identifying disengagement proactively and early
- Helping youth build strong relationships with caring adults
- Integrating academic and social-emotional supports
- Increasing access to out-of-school learning and enrichment
- **Establishing clear, attainable pathways to post-secondary education or training**

Communities that embed these supports where young people already are—schools, after-school programs, and neighborhood-based organizations—and align them across developmental stages see higher rates of school attendance, persistence, and post-secondary success.

Washington County is not starting from scratch in this work. Across the county, schools and local organizations

are already advancing many of these evidence-based practices. Programs such as WCPS Community Schools, after-school and summer enrichment, mentoring, family support services, and career exposure initiatives reflect a coordinated, prevention-oriented approach to keeping young people connected to school, supportive adults, and future opportunities.

Together, these efforts support our youth during key transition points from adolescence into adulthood.

While youth disconnection is currently higher than we would like, the presence of these aligned supports in the community provides a strong foundation for future work. By **strengthening community collaboration** to scale programs that we know have a positive impact and align our efforts around key metrics (e.g., school attendance, academic progress, workforce readiness, and post-secondary attainment), Washington County can build on its existing strengths to ensure more young people stay engaged and on the path to a living-wage career.

R E A D Y

Making Strides: PROGRESS ON CAREER READINESS



Academic achievement in the early and middle grades lays the foundation for long-term success. Students who reach key milestones—like reading proficiently by third grade and completing Algebra I by ninth grade—are far more likely to graduate, pursue college or training, and earn a postsecondary credential. **Early literacy and math skills remain some of the strongest indicators of future opportunity.**

If Washington County aims to prepare every student for college, apprenticeships, and technical careers, strong performance throughout K–12 is essential. Progress in kindergarten readiness, reading and math proficiency, and dual enrollment reflects more than academic gains—it expands access to postsecondary pathways.

Just as our economy signals where opportunity is growing, our education data shows how well we’re preparing students to meet it. In recent years, schools across the county have strengthened every stage of the cradle-to-career pipeline, from early childhood literacy to dual enrollment and technical training. **We’re seeing steady, albeit slow, progress:** more children entering school ready to learn, more students mastering essential skills, and more graduates earning college credits or industry credentials. In short, **Washington County is moving in the right direction but we need to move faster.**

The following section highlights key indicators of that growth and the milestones achieved since our last community report in 2019.

	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL					HIGH SCHOOL (Class of 2025)				POST- SECONDARY	ADULTHOOD
OUTCOMES	Kindergarten Readiness	Literacy Proficiency		Math Proficiency		College and Career Ready				College Enrollment	Prepared for Career
INDICATORS	% Meeting Standards on KRA	% Proficient Grade 3-8 MCAP ELA	% Proficient English 10 MCAP ELA	% Proficient Grades 3-8 MCAP Math	% Proficient Algebra 1 MCAP Math	% Completing CTE Program	% Passing CTE Assessment	% Dually Enrolled at HCC	Graduation Rate	% Enrolling in College	Pop 25+ with Associates or Higher
2019	43%	36.9%	47%	35%	44%	30%	25%	21%	93.1%	59.7% (12 mo) 61.1% (16 mo)	29.2%
2025	55.4% ↑ (2023-24)	51.5% ↑	75% ↑	30% ↓	31% ↓	55% ↑	26% ↑	74% ↑	89.7% ↓	53.6% (12 mo) ↓ 60.7% (16 mo) ↓	33% ↑
2025 GOAL	70%	70%	50%	70%	50%	40%	34%	30%	94%	65%	35%



Although we met **just three 2025 goals** in the time since our previous report was published, we are making slow but steady progress. **Our aim now should be to accelerate improvement on all of the metrics described above.**

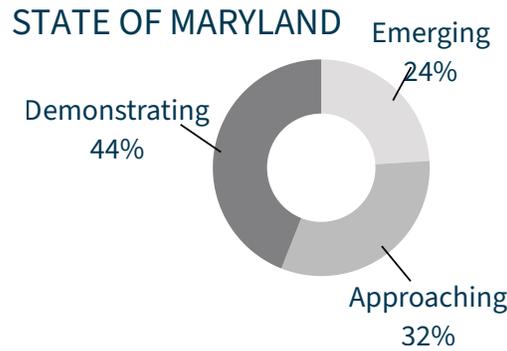
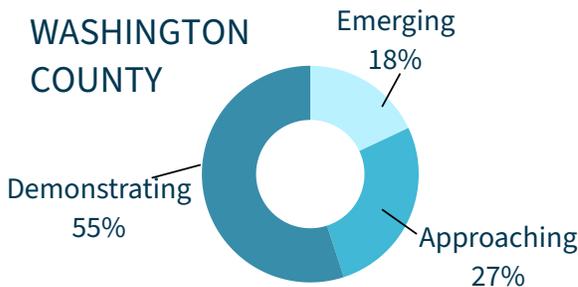
Preparing the Youngest of Us:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION METRICS

Following the recommendations of our 2019 report, early childhood education became a central focus area for Washington County—and the results show meaningful progress. **Kindergarten readiness has increased dramatically since 2019**, reflecting intentional and widespread efforts to expand high-quality pre-K programming, **and we now outperform the state average by 11%**. This growth matters: decades of research confirms that children who enter school ready to learn are far more likely to read proficiently by third grade, master foundational math, stay on track in middle school, and ultimately complete the postsecondary education or training required for today’s living-wage careers.^[14] In other words, **the path to a credentialed, career-ready workforce begins long before high school.**



OVERALL KINDERGARTEN READINESS SCORES ^[13]



Demonstrating
Performing at the expected level

Approaching
Close, but below the expected level

Emerging
Not yet approaching the expected level

KINDERGARTEN READINESS DOMAINS

Social Foundations

Children’s ability to manage emotions, follow routines, and interact positively with peers and adults

Language and Literacy

Early communication and pre-reading skills that support understanding, expression, and later reading success

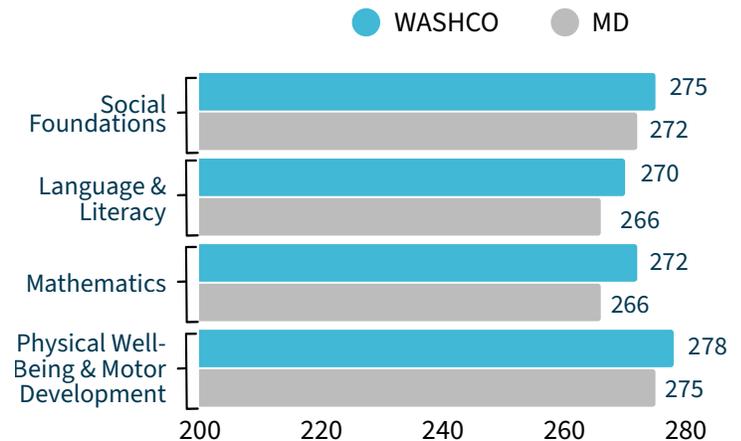
Mathematics

Foundational number sense and problem-solving skills that prepare children for future math learning

Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

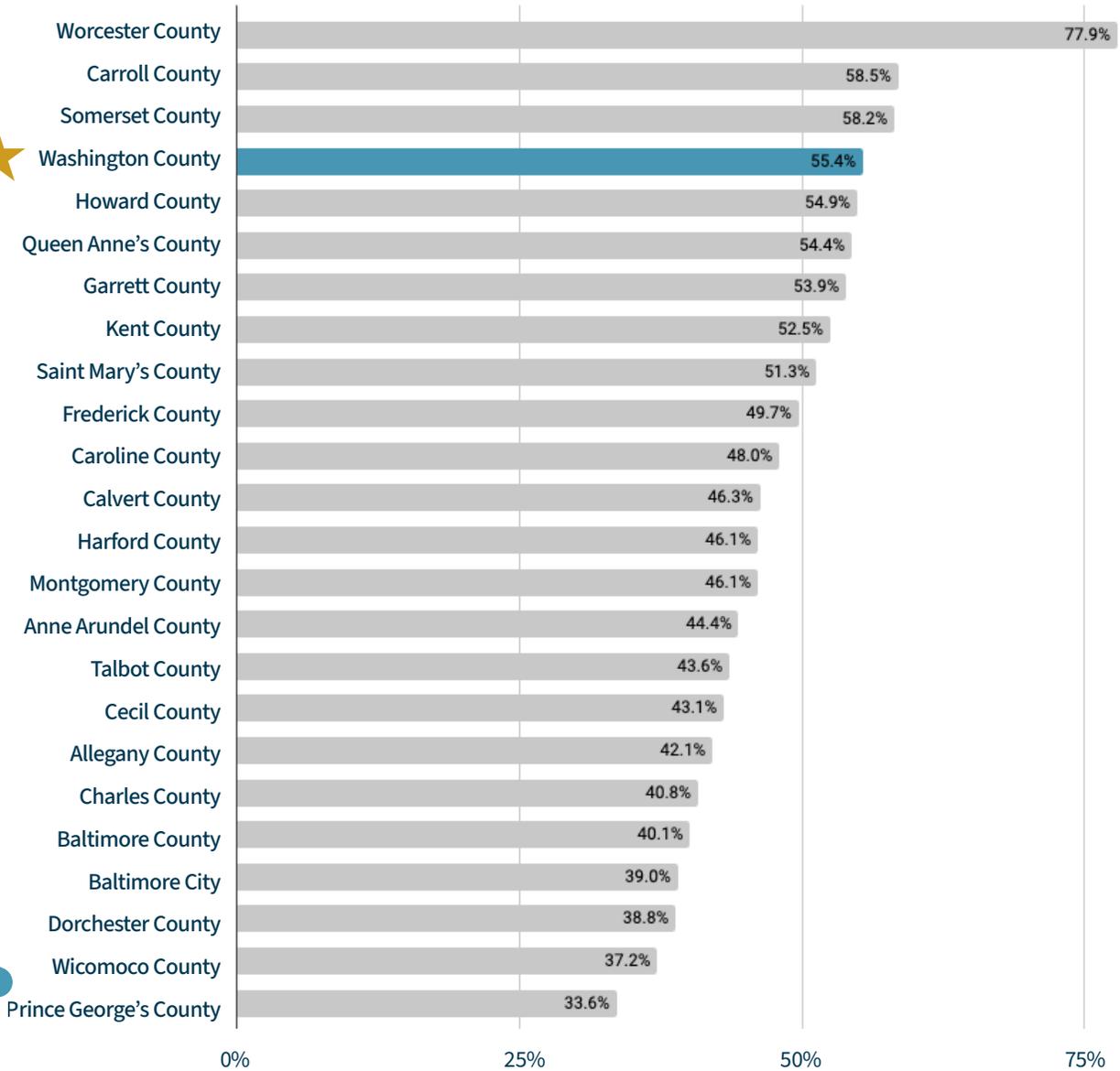
Physical health, stamina, and fine and gross motor skills needed to participate fully in classroom activities

AVERAGE DOMAIN SCALE SCORES ^[15]



Kindergarteners Demonstrating Readiness

by County ^[15]



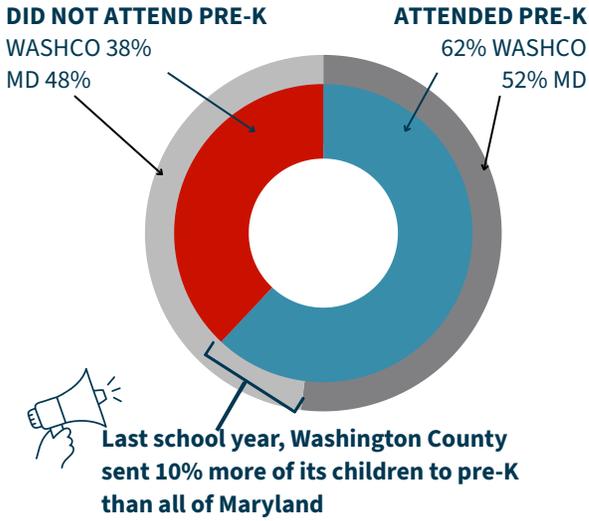
WASHINGTON COUNTY

JUMPED FROM **23RD** IN 2017
TO **4TH** IN THE STATE IN 2024

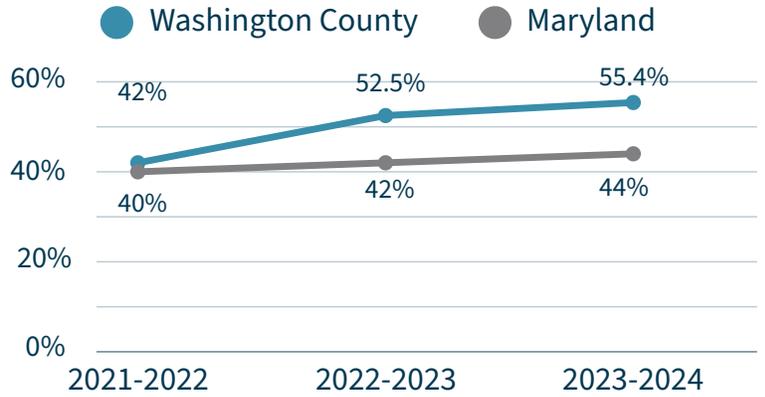
KINDERGARTEN

Preparing the Youngest of Us

PRE-K ATTENDANCE RATES [15]



KINDERGARTEN READINESS RATES BY SCHOOL YEAR [15, 16, 17]



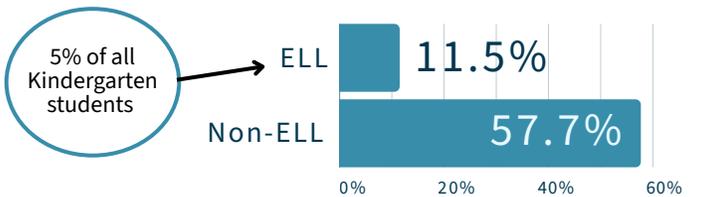
Even with these tremendous gains in kindergarten readiness, gaps remain across neighborhoods and demographic groups, underscoring the need for continued investment in early learning, family engagement, and access to high-quality pre-K. The following charts illustrate where we stand today—showing improvements in readiness, expanding pre-K access, and the shifting demographics of our county’s youngest learners—and point to opportunities to strengthen the cradle-to-career pipeline from its very first step.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS RATES BY SUBGROUP (% Children Demonstrating MCAP KRA Proficiency)

(% Children Demonstrating MCAP KRA Proficiency)

[26]

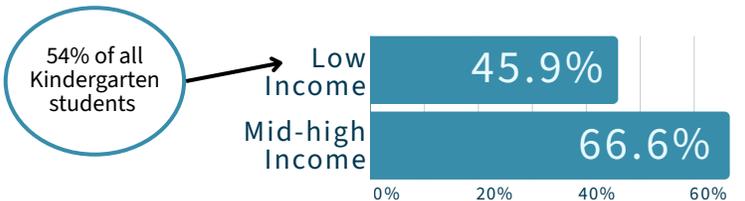
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) STATUS



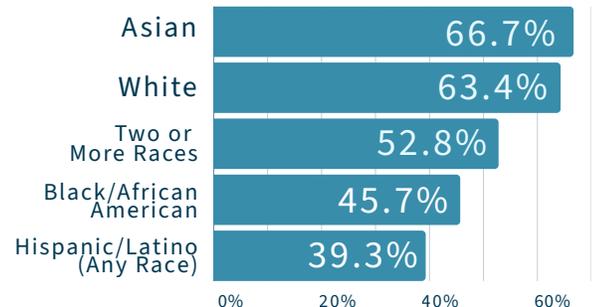
STUDENT WITH DISABILITY (SWD) STATUS



FAMILY INCOME LEVEL



RACE/ ETHNICITY



Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success:

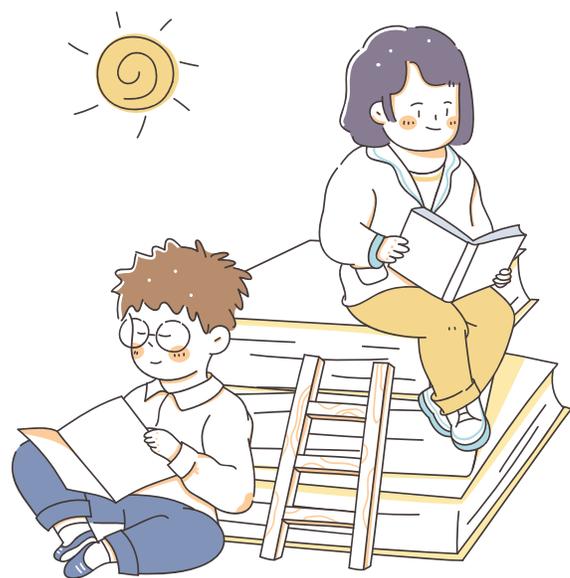
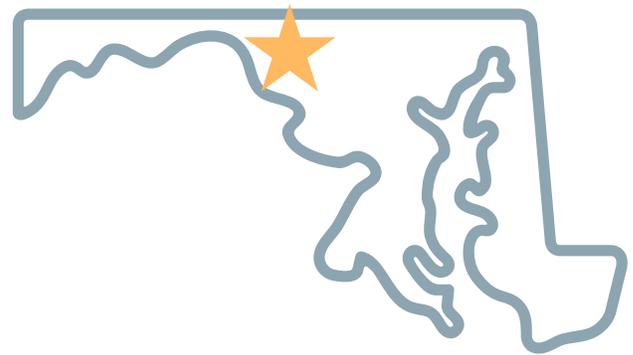
SCHOOL-AGED EDUCATION METRICS

Washington County has made steady progress in recent years on key measures of K-12 student learning and career readiness. These gains reflect the collective efforts of educators, families, and community partners to expand critical opportunities for all students. Yet persistent challenges—such as chronic absenteeism and uneven postsecondary attainment—underscore the work still ahead. **As our county looks to the future, a clear focus on cradle-to-career alignment remains essential: ensuring that every child enters school ready to learn, stays engaged through graduation, and transitions seamlessly into the education, training, or career pathway that leads to long-term success.**



The Maryland Report Card

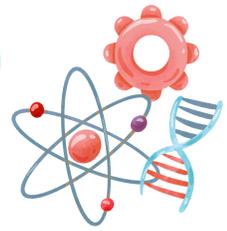
Washington County Public Schools **outperformed the state average** in Maryland’s 2024–2025 School Report Card results, with 56.4% of schools earning 4 or 5 stars compared to just 43% statewide.^[18] Our district showed steady gains in student achievement across grade levels, with nearly all schools maintaining or improving their ratings.



Beating the Odds on Teaching Kids to Read

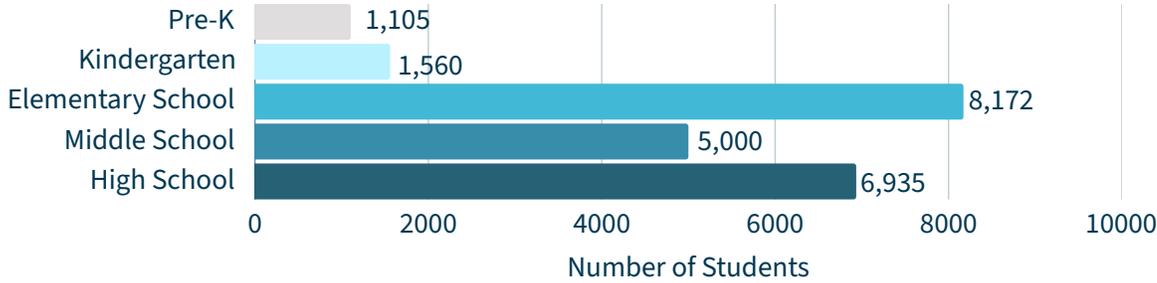
Washington County is described as a national **“bright spot” in literacy education**^[19] because its schools have significantly improved early literacy outcomes despite serving a diverse, often economically challenged student population. Our district invested early in evidence-based reading instruction aligned with the science of reading, provided systemwide teacher training in phonics and structured literacy, and used consistent curriculum and data monitoring to ensure early intervention. As a result, Washington County students—especially those in early grades—made notable gains in reading proficiency, outperforming state averages and demonstrating that sustained, districtwide commitment to structured literacy can close learning gaps.

Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success



WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 2025-2026 STUDENT ENROLLMENT ^[20]

TOTAL ENROLLMENT: 22,772



ENROLLMENT DEOMGRAPHICS ^[20]

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED



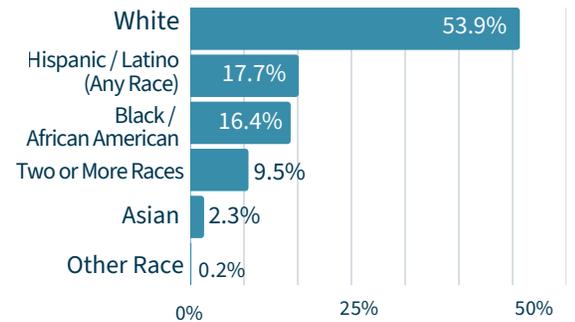
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS



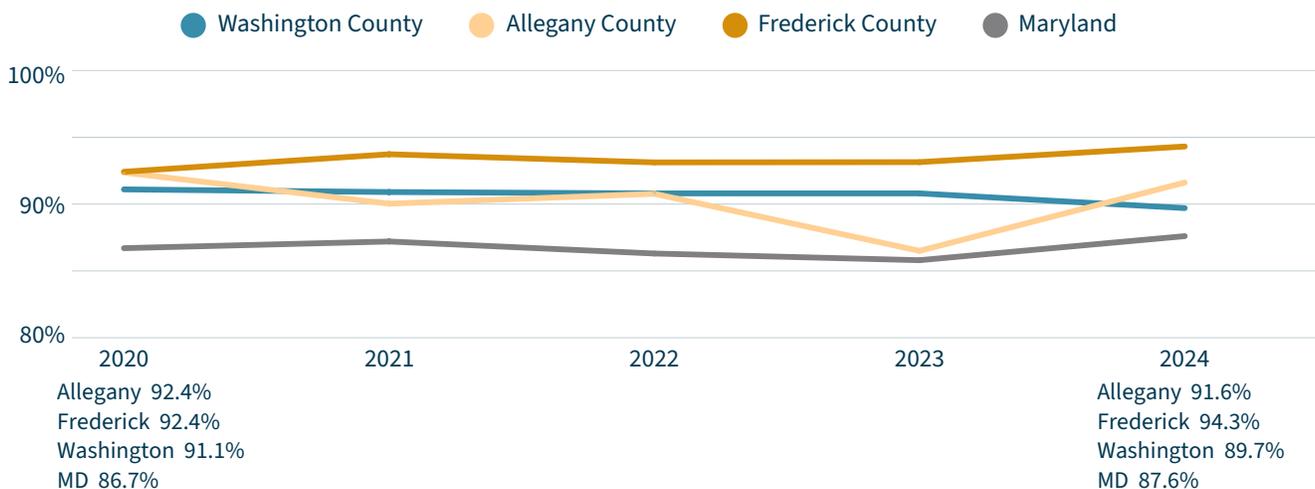
RACE/ ETHNICITY



High School Graduation in Context

High school graduation rates declined nationwide in the years following the pandemic as schools grappled with disrupted learning, chronic absenteeism, and intensifying student needs. Both Maryland and Washington County experienced similar setbacks, and while recovery is underway, our progress has been uneven. The following trend lines for Washington, Allegany, and Frederick Counties and Maryland illustrate how our region is making progress to regain pre-pandemic momentum and ensure more students successfully complete high school.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES OVER TIME ^[21,22,23,24,25]



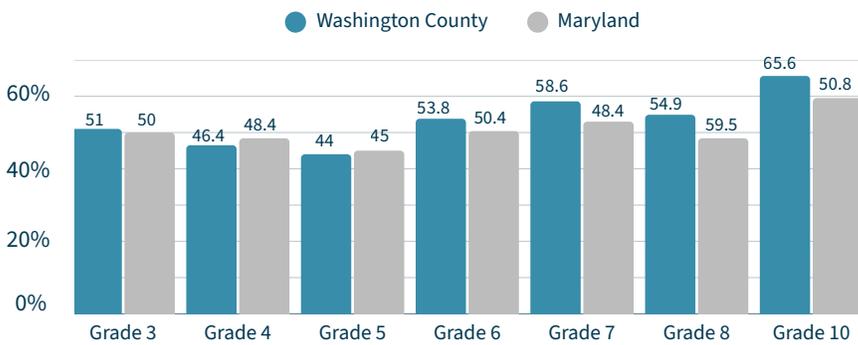
Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success



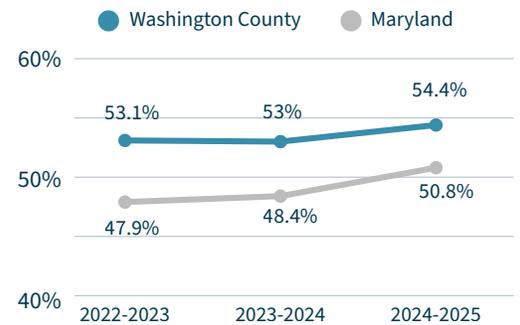
Literacy / ELA

In recent years, Washington County has made steady, measurable gains in literacy and English Language Arts (ELA). Our most recent MCAP results (spring 2025) showed that roughly **54% of WCPS students in all grades achieved proficiency in ELA, compared with roughly 51% statewide.** That means our students are now outperforming the state average in ELA, and Maryland as a whole has seen three straight years of ELA growth, driven in part by a stronger focus on evidence-based literacy instruction.

MCAP ELA PROFICIENCY RATES BY GRADE [26]



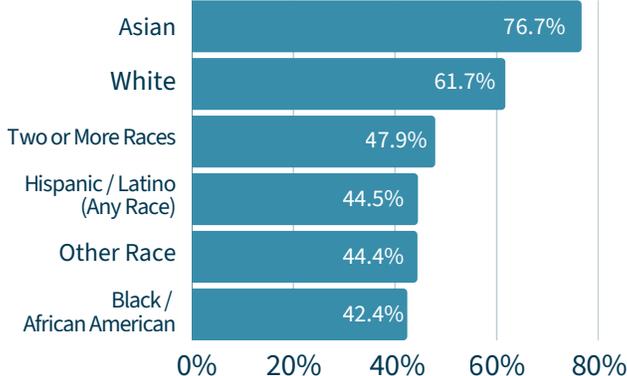
MCAP ELA PROFICIENCY RATES BY SCHOOL YEAR [26, 27, 28]



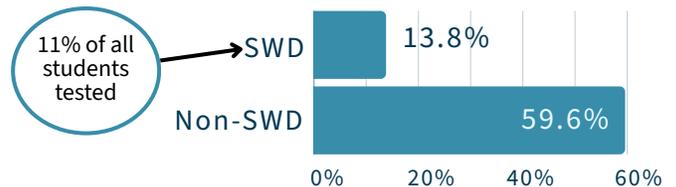
Even so, these gains are not uniformly shared. Across Washington County, economically disadvantaged students, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities lag well behind overall ELA proficiency rates, often by 20 or more percentage points. While our overall ELA performance is a clear success story, students of color and students receiving special education services remain far less likely to reach proficiency than their peers. **Literacy is clearly a countywide strength, but reaching all students will depend on our ability to close persistent subgroup gaps, particularly for students of color and students with disabilities.**

MCAP ELA PROFICIENCY RATES BY SUBGROUP (% of Students Demonstrating MCAP ELA Proficiency) [26]

RACE/ETHNICITY



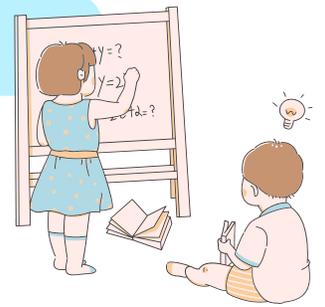
STUDENT WITH DISABILITY (SWD) STATUS



FAMILY INCOME LEVEL



Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success

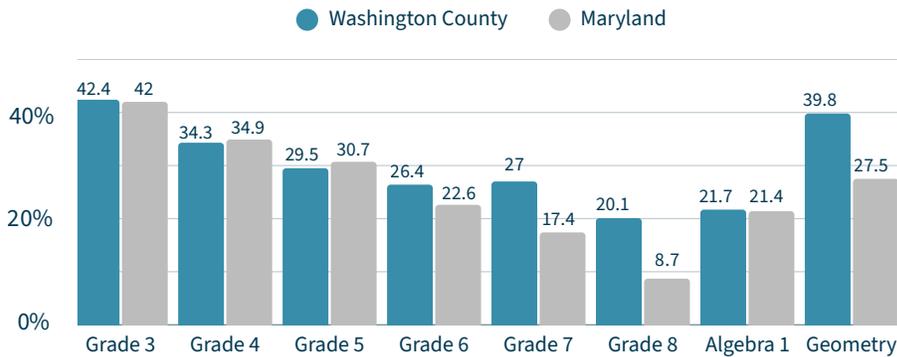


Mathematics

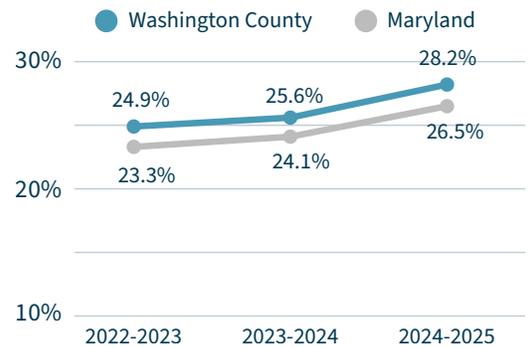
In math, the story is more sobering. Statewide, only 27% of students achieved proficiency in math in 2025, which is still well below pre-pandemic levels. Washington County reflects these statewide results—in 2025, only 28% of WCPS students in all grades achieved proficiency in math.

The urgency of these results cannot be understated—at the same time that STEM and math-dependent careers are driving regional and national job growth, less than a third of our students are demonstrating on-grade-level math proficiency. And, as in ELA, math gaps are widest for students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and low-income students. From this we can conclude that **math is one of our most urgent academic challenges**: we’ve made some progress, but we have a long way to go to prepare students for the technical and analytical demands of living-wage careers.

MCAP ELA PROFICIENCY RATES BY GRADE [26]

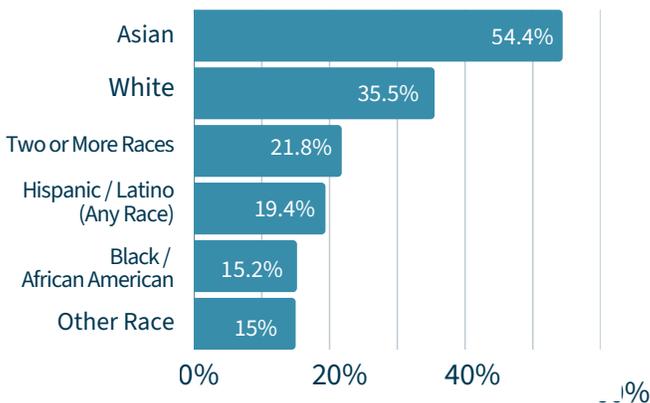


MCAP MATH PROFICIENCY RATES BY SCHOOL YEAR [26, 27, 28]



MCAP MATH PROFICIENCY RATES BY SUBGROUP (% of Students Demonstrating MCAP MATH Proficiency) [26]

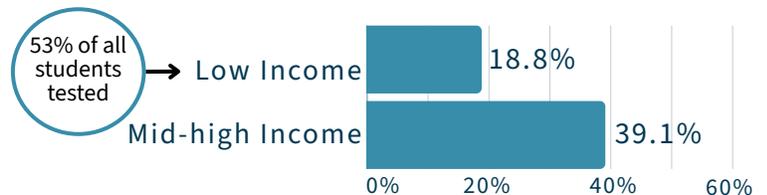
RACE/ETHNICITY



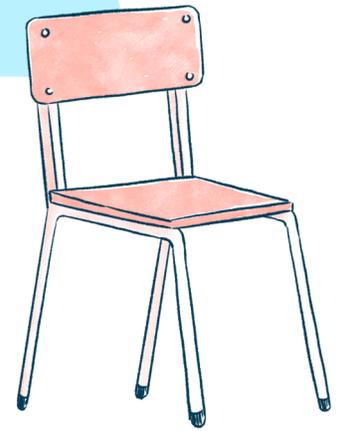
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY (SWD) STATUS



FAMILY INCOME LEVEL



Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success

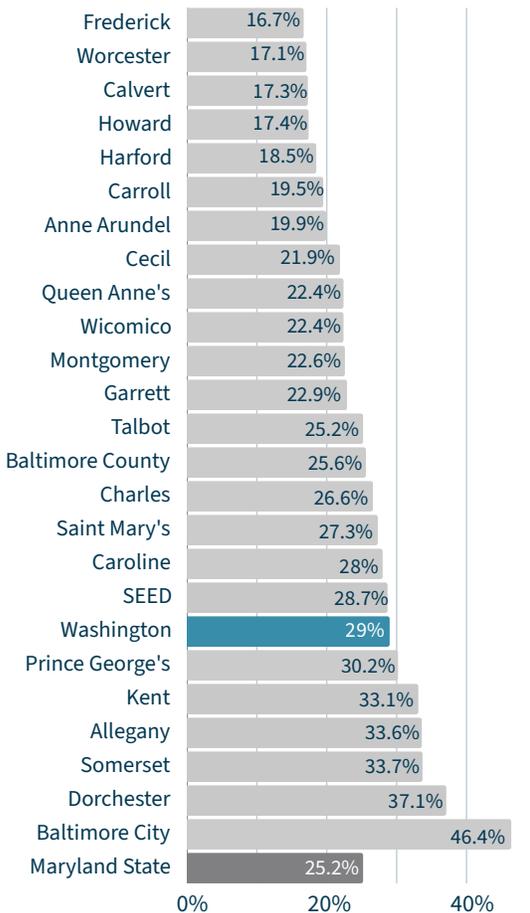


Chronic Absenteeism

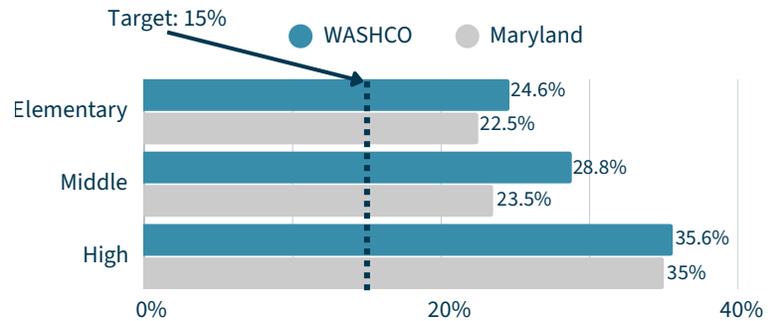
Regular school attendance is one of the strongest predictors of academic success, graduation, and long-term economic stability. **Students who are chronically absent (missing 10% or more of the school year) are less likely to read proficiently by third grade, stay on track in middle school, and graduate high school on time.** Chronic absenteeism also signals broader challenges in student engagement, transportation, health, or family stability, making it a key metric of both educational and community well-being.

Washington County, like the rest of the nation, experienced a sharp rise in absenteeism during and after the global pandemic, and absenteeism rates remain above the state’s 15% target. Although attendance has begun to stabilize, too many students are still missing critical instructional time—time that directly affects achievement and readiness for college and career. Reducing chronic absenteeism will require coordinated efforts across schools, families, and community partners to remove barriers, re-engage students, and ensure every child is present and connected to learning.

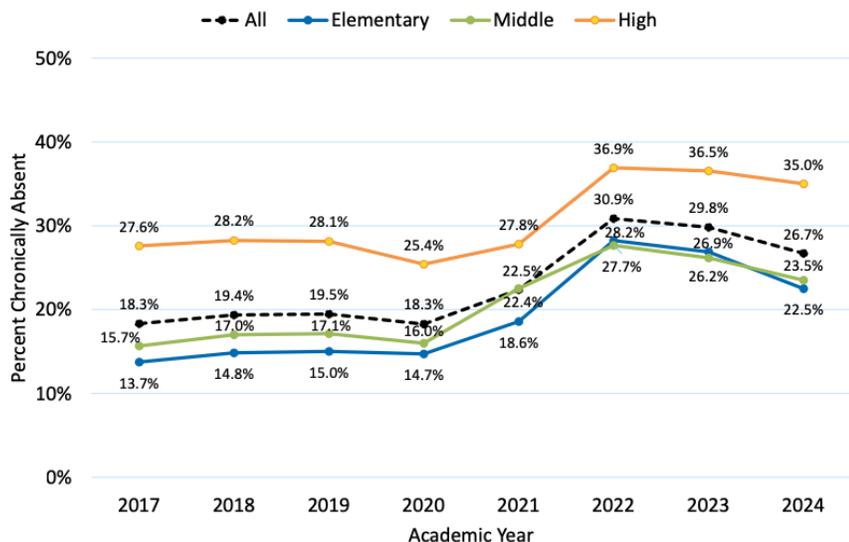
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY COUNTY ^[36]



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY SCHOOL LEVEL ^[36]



STATEWIDE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY SCHOOL LEVEL ^[37]



Moving the Needle on K-12 Student Success

Career-Ready Programming in WCPS

Washington County Public Schools offer a comprehensive set of pathways that support career readiness for all students. Students can pursue advanced academics through both Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, earning rigorous preparation and opportunities for college credit. Through dual enrollment and early college partnerships with HCC, students may earn college credits or even an associate’s degree while still in high school. In addition, specialized magnet, gifted, and career and technical education programs—including arts, STEM, and more than **40 other CTE pathways with associated apprenticeships**—provide hands-on, career-aligned options that prepare students for post-secondary education, training, or immediate entry into the workforce.



★ We’ve made the greatest gains in our cradle-to-career metrics in **dual enrollment at HCC**, where more, and more diverse, students are getting a head start on a college degree.

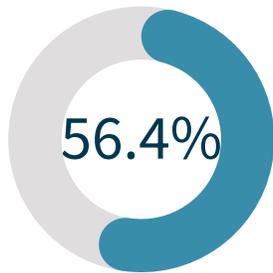
WCPS DUAL ENROLLMENT AT HCC



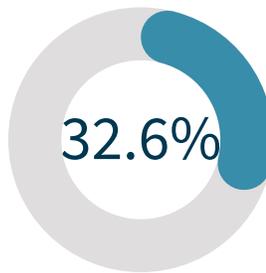
CLASS OF 2025

- 74%** Students **earning dual credit**
- 69** Students **completing an apprenticeship**
- 48** Students **earning an associate’s degree**

GRADUATES ENROLLING IN CTE PROGRAMS



GRADUATES COMPLETING CTE PROGRAMS



GRADUATES PASSING CTE EXAM ^[39]

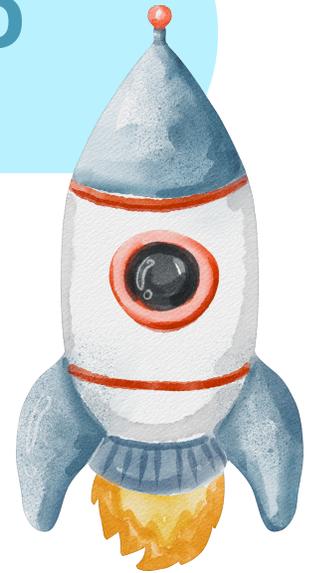


WCPS is intentionally aligning its programming to meet multiple student goals: college credit in high school, access to workforce-relevant credentials, and rigorous academic preparation for those on a traditional college path. This cradle-to-career flexibility ensures students can choose a path that fits their strengths and interests, whether that leads to a two- or four-year degree, a technical certificate, or directly into high-skill employment.



Post-Secondary Transition:

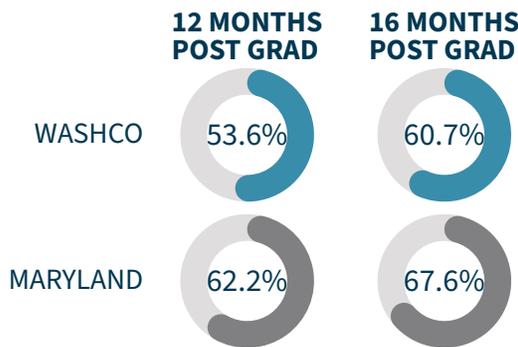
EXPANDING THE LAUNCHPAD TO OPPORTUNITY



Washington County has made meaningful gains in post-secondary enrollment and degree attainment, but the bar continues to rise. With more than 70% of new jobs projected to require education or training beyond high school by 2031, **our community must dramatically increase the number of residents who complete a certificate, apprenticeship, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree in order to secure living-wage careers.** This moment also offers new opportunities: nationally, apprenticeships and skilled-trade programs are seeing renewed momentum, and Washington County is well-positioned to lead in this area through the expanding career and technical programs at Hagerstown Community College’s Bowman Center.

Community college remains one of the most effective and affordable entry points into higher education. More than 35% of enrollees at Hagerstown Community College (HCC) are recent graduates of WCPS, and conversely, over 70% of college-bound graduates from WCPS enroll at HCC in their first year. By strengthening supports for dual enrollment, advising, and financial aid—along with improving credit transfer pathways to Maryland’s four-year universities—we can help far more students start strong, stay on track, and complete the credentials that open doors to family-sustaining wages.

H.S. GRADUATES ENROLLING IN COLLEGE ^[40]



HAGERSTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT ^[38]



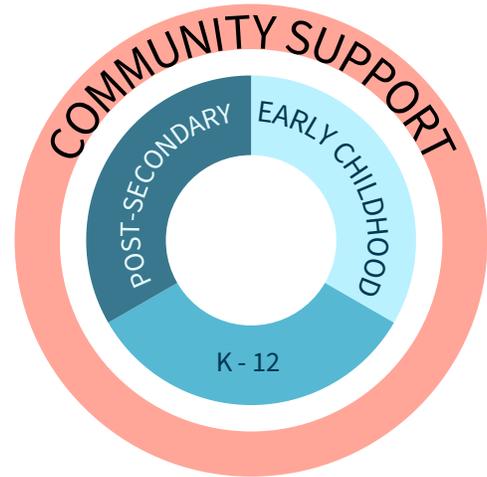
ACTION

A CALL TO ACTION

Our vision for Washington County is clear: **every resident should have an attainable pathway to a living-wage career.** And we believe that achieving that vision depends on one crucial factor: **increasing the number of people who earn post-secondary credentials and degrees.** In today's labor market, these credentials are no longer optional but are instead critical to providing meaningful opportunity, economic security, and upward mobility.

Across our community, the building blocks of a strong cradle-to-career system are already in place. Expanded early childhood programs and our growing network of Community Schools offer families the foundational support children need to enter school ready to learn and stay on track. As students move through our K-12 system, rigorous academic options—paired with more than 40 CTE pathways, youth apprenticeships, and employer partnerships—help them discover their interests, build real skills, and understand the credentials required for a living-wage career.

This momentum is maintained when early gains translate into post-secondary success. Dual enrollment and Early College pathways with HCC reduce both the cost and time to a degree. Hagerstown Community College's workforce programs, along with emerging opportunities like the



Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine, give residents accessible, local routes into high-skill, high-demand fields. And adult education programs ensure that learning, retraining, and credentialing remain possible at any age.

These efforts demonstrate that while Washington County is moving in the right direction, the path ahead requires deeper alignment across the cradle-to-career continuum and a collective commitment to our goal: more residents enrolling in, persisting through, and completing post-secondary education and training. Our six levers for action provide the framework—and the collective responsibility—to turn this vision into measurable progress.



**AWARENESS
AND
ASPIRATION**



**READINESS AND
FOUNDATIONAL
SKILLS**



**ACCESS AND
NAVIGATION
SUPPORT**



**ABILITY TO
PERSIST**



**FINANCING AND
AFFORDABILITY**



**CREDENTIAL-
TO-CAREER
CONNECTIONS**

By working together to build on our strengths and concentrate on the areas of greatest need, we can ensure that every learner—at any stage of life—has the support, skills, and financial access required to complete a credential or degree and step into a living-wage career. This shared commitment is the core of our vision and the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous Washington County.

thank you to our **COMMUNITY PARTNERS**



We are grateful to the many organizations striving to advance workforce readiness and opportunity in Washington County. *The following organizations served as active partners in the OnTrack Washington County movement from 2015-2021.*



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*Tomorrow belongs to the people who
prepare for it today.*

