



BENCHMARKING SPECIALIZED PROGRAM MODELS

Dekalb County Public Schools

June 2025

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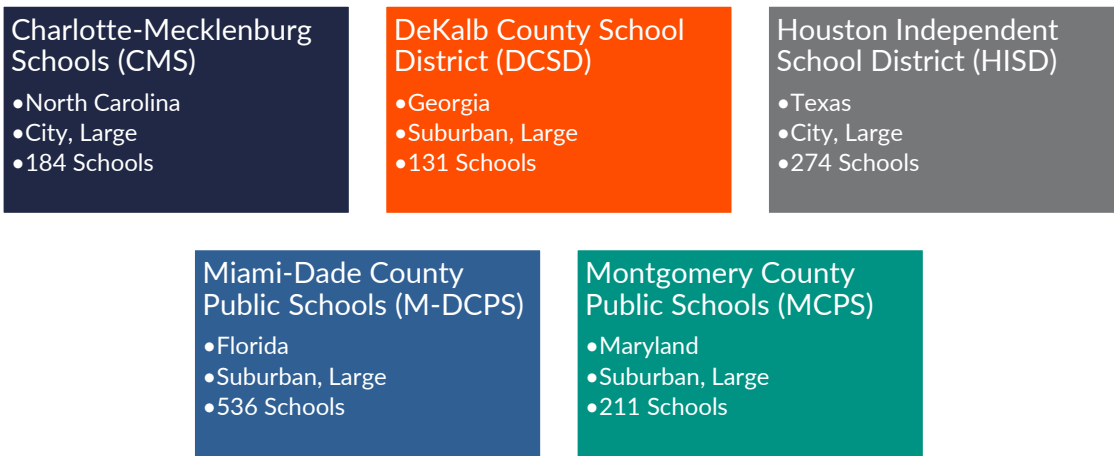
INTRODUCTION

DeKalb County School District (DCSD) is exploring different school-based program options to better understand how specialized programs can support diverse student needs and interests. To support this effort, DCSD has partnered with Hanover Research (Hanover) to conduct a benchmarking study. This study focuses on identifying and profiling large urban school districts that offer a range of specialized programs, such as dual language immersion, Montessori models, STEM-focused academies, International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, early college high schools, arts integration programs, and career and technical education (CTE) pathways. Insights from this benchmarking study will help inform DCSD’s exploration of potential future program offerings. This effort reflects DCSD’s commitment to continually assessing new opportunities that enhance student learning and educational equity.

METHODOLOGY

Hanover used the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES) locale classifications to identify Large Urban school districts. NCES defines a “Large, City” districts as, a “territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.” NCES further defines a Large Suburban district as a “territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.”¹ Because NCES classifies DeKalb County as a Large Suburban district, Hanover reviewed large suburban districts as well as midsize to large city districts for this analysis.² Figure ES.1 presents the NCES locale classification for Dekalb County and the other districts profiled in this report. It also includes the number of schools in the district reported by NCES as of the 2023-24 school year.

Figure ES.1: NCES District Locale Classifications



Source: National Center for Education Statistics³

¹ “Locale Definitions.” National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports/topical-studies/locale/definitions>

² “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Dekalb County.” National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=dekalb&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&DistrictType=8&DistrictType=9&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=1301740

³ “Search for Public School Districts.” National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests DCSD consider the following recommendations:

-  **Expand and diversify specialized program offerings using vertically aligned pathways across all grade bands.** Several districts offer comprehensive K-12 access to specialized magnet programs, including in high-demand areas like STEM and the arts. Miami-Dade (M-DCPS) offers a large variety of programs around career-related themes as early as elementary school.
-  **Explore the magnet consortium model for targeted regional programming.** Montgomery County (MCPS) offers middle and high school clusters that are geographically based and offer distinct, whole-school thematic programs under a shared choice lottery process. Students within the consortium boundary are guaranteed access to one of the schools, and out-of-boundary students can apply via the choice process. This program was designed to increase academic performance and options and reduce socioeconomic isolation in the target schools within the consortium.
-  **Conduct research to identify the district community's perceptions and needs for specialized programming.** Surveys and interviews can provide insights into the perceived gaps and barriers in current program access. It can also gauge parent and student interest in new program offerings, such as extended CTE academies, language immersion, or advanced programming options.

KEY FINDINGS

Figure ES.2 below presents a summary of the specialized program findings across the four benchmarked districts. For each program, the figure includes the applicable grade levels and any relevant details.

Figure ES.2: Summary Table (with Grade Levels)

PROGRAM	CMS	HISD	M-DCPS	MCPS
Advanced/Gifted Specialized Programs	K-5; LI/TD Magnet Program	K-12; Vanguard Program	K-12; Cambridge International	4-5; Elem. Center for Enriched Studies
Early College High Schools/Credit	Grades 9-13 (optional fifth year)	Grades 9-12	Grades 11-12	Grades 11-12
International Baccalaureate	Pre K-12 (PYP, MYP, & DP)	K-12 (PYP, MYP, & DP)	K-12 (PYP, MYP, & DP)	K-12 (PYP, MYP, & DP)
Language Immersion	K-5, with 6-12 Continuation	Pre K-12	K-12	K-5, with 6-8 Continuation
Two-Way	Spanish	PreK-5 (French); PreK-8, (Arabic & Mandarin); PreK-12 (Spanish)	K-12 (French, German, Italian, & Spanish); PreK-8 (Portuguese)	Spanish
One-Way	French, German, Chinese, & Japanese	Spanish (K-12, ELLs)		French and Chinese
Montessori	Pre K-12	Pre K-12	K-5	6-12
Magnets/Academies	K-12	Pre K-12	K-12 (400 programs)	6-12
STEM/STEAM	K-12	K-12	K-12	6-12
Arts Integration	K-12	K-12	3-12	6-12
CTE/ Career	9-12; Digital Marketing & Multimedia Design; Law, social Justice, and Forensic Pathology	9-12; General, Tech, Architecture & Construction, and Health Science	9-12; General, Engineering, Finance, Health Sciences, Hospitality & Tourism, IT, Agriscience, & Teaching	9-12; General, Technology, STEM, Apprenticeship, etc.

PROGRAM	CMS	HISD	M-DCPS	MCPS
<i>Other</i>	Leadership (K-5)		Magnet and Choice programming designed around eleven themes of study:	Leadership (9-12), Magnet Consortia (6-12)



School districts offer a wide variety of magnet programs and academies, including programs related to STEM, Arts, and CTE. Three districts (CMS, HISD, & M-DCPS) offer magnet programs for all grade levels K-12, including STEM and Art integration magnet programs. MCPS offers these programs at the secondary level (6-12). All four districts also offer CTE or Career Academies for students in grades 9-12. For example, CMS offers a Digital Marketing program and a Law, Social Justice, and Forensic Pathology magnet program. Two districts also offer Leadership magnet programs, although CMS offers this at the elementary level while MCPS offers leadership at the high school level.



M-DCPS is highly rated for its magnet programs and offers the largest number of magnet and specialized programs among the four districts. It provides 400 magnet programs and 1,071 parent choice options for K-12 students, organized around 11 distinct themes. MCPS follows, offering dozens of county-wide and regional programs at the secondary level, with most concentrated in high schools.



Each district offers Early College High School programs or similar credit-earning programs where students earn up to up two years of college credit or an Associate Degree. However, the grade levels for these programs vary slightly. M-DCPS and MCPS offer Early College programs for older high school students in Grades 11-12. HISD offers Early College and Futures Academies across Grades 9-12. At CMS, the grade range for Early College programs varies, with the Middle College High School program for Grades 11-12 and other programs running from Grades 9-12 with an optional fifth (Grade 13) year.



Other common specialized program offerings in the benchmarked districts include International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, Montessori programs, advanced academic whole-school magnets, and language immersion programs. All districts offer IB program options for students in Grades K-12, including the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), and Diploma Programme (DP). All districts also offer Montessori programs, though the grade levels served vary widely. CMS and MCPS additionally provide elementary gifted programming, including the Learning Immersion/Talent Development (LI/TD) magnet program for Grades K-5 at CMS and the Center for Enriched Studies at MCPS. Districts also offer a variety of one-way and two-way language immersion models. HISD stands out for its two-way immersion programs in Arabic and Mandarin for Pre-K-8 students, while M-DCPS is notable for its K-12 two-way International Studies immersion programs offered in collaboration with the French, German, Spanish, and Italian education ministries



MCPS implements an innovative consortia magnet program model at both the middle and high school levels. One middle school consortium consists of three whole-school magnet schools with shared boundaries, each offering an enriched curriculum centered around a unique theme (e.g., digital design, the arts, and aerospace technology). Similarly, eight high schools are organized into two distinct consortia, with each school offering specialized curriculum aligned to a specific theme or signature program. In this model, all students residing within the consortium boundaries participate in a school choice lottery and are guaranteed placement in one of the schools. Out-of-boundary students may also opt into the lottery process.



While all four districts use lotteries for specialized program enrollment, the structure and process vary. Three districts—CMS, HISD, and M-DCPS—use a single, district-wide lottery window each year for enrollment in specialized programs. In these systems, applicants submit one

application for all open-enrollment programs and rank their preferred options. The number of ranked choices ranges from three (CMS) to five (HISD and M-DCPS). M-DCPS differs slightly in that its district-wide lottery applies only to magnet schools. For other parent choice options outside a student's residential zone, families apply directly to individual programs without participating in the centralized lottery. MCPS is the only district among the four that primarily uses site-specific lotteries for most specialized programs. However, it also operates a district-wide lottery for its middle and high school magnet consortia programs.

SECTION I: LARGE CITY DISTRICTS

This section profiles specialized programming at two Large City districts, as classified by NCES Local Classifications.

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS (CMS)

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) offers a broad range of specialized program options across grades Pre K through 12. Specialized programming at CMS is primarily accessed through the school choice lottery. This district-wide lottery allows students apply to up to three options during the annual school choice process.⁴ Specialty program options include a range of models such as magnet programs, language immersion programs, IB and Montessori programs, and early college high schools. Figure 1.1 provides a summary of these program models and their offerings for students by grade level.⁵

Figure 1.1: Specialty Programming at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Magnet Programs •STEM (K-12) •Arts (K-12) •Leadership (K-5) •CTE (9-12): digital marketing magnet and law, social justice, and forensic pathology magnet	World Languages & Language Immersion •One and Two way Immersion (K-12) •Non-immersion language programs (6-8)	International Baccalaureate •Primary Years Programme (PreK-5) •Middle Years Programme (6-10) •IB Diploma Programme (11-12)
Elementary Gifted Program •Learning Immersion program (K-2) •Talent Development program (3-5), requires gifted identification	Montessori Program •Elementary program (Pre K-6) •Secondary program (7-12)	Early College High Schools •Middle College High Schools (grades 11-13) (includes 5th high school year) •Early College pathways with credentials in Engineering, Teaching or an Associate Degree

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools⁶

MAGNET PROGRAMS (STEM, ARTS, LEADERSHIP, & CTE)

CMS magnet programs are choice schools that offer thematic curricula in specific focus areas such as STEM, visual and performing arts, leadership, and CTE. Students from across the district can apply to these programs through a lottery, attending full-time schools that integrate the specialized theme into all aspects of learning. Magnet programs exist at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, creating pipelines that allow students to pursue their interests continuously as they advance in grade. STEM and arts magnet programs are available to students across all grade levels, while the leadership magnets are only available at the elementary level and CTE magnets are available at the high school level. While magnet schools follow the standard state curriculum, they distinguish themselves by using unique instructional models and

⁴ "School Choice: Registration & Lottery/Transfer." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14372>

⁵ "School Choice: Themes & Schools." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

<https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cmsk12.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D14371>

⁶ Ibid.

enriched content related to their theme.⁷ Figure 1.2 describes each of the three magnet programs available to students in the district.

Figure 1.2: Magnet Programs at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

STEM/STEAM • Grades K-12 • Includes general programs and specialized pathways in computer science/coding and environmental sustainability • STEAM programs also include arts-infused lessons that enhance creativity in technical fields.	Visual & Performing Arts • Grades K-12 • Elementary level focuses on exposure and integration of art in core subjects • At the secondary level students may concentrate in specific disciplines, audition or select a focus, and receive pre-professional training	Leadership • Grades K-5 • Focus on developing strong character, civic responsibility, and leadership skills in students from an early age • Leader in Me Model uses integrated curriculum to develop students socially, emotionally, academically and ethically	CTE • Grades 9-12 • iMeck Academy of Global Influencers (Digital Marketing & Multimedia Design) • Law, Social Justice, and Forensic Pathology Magnet
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Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools⁸

WORLD LANGUAGES & LANGUAGE IMMERSION

CMS offers language learning through Language Immersion and World Languages specialty programming. Starting in kindergarten or first grade, students learn math, science, and social studies primarily in target languages such as Spanish, Chinese, French, German, or Japanese. Many programs use a two-way immersion model that mixes native English and native target-language speakers to promote peer learning. The pathway continues through high school with advanced coursework and the opportunity to earn biliteracy credentials. Entry after first grade generally requires prior language experience or assessment. Starting in Grade 6, students can participate in world language (non-immersion) programs to learn languages such as Chinese, French, German, Japanese or Spanish.⁹

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE (IB) PROGRAMS

CMS offers the three main IB programs spanning grades Pre K–12. Across all levels, IB in CMS promotes inquiry, critical thinking, community service, and intercultural understanding, preparing students for academic success and global citizenship. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) serves students in grades PreK–5. It focuses on global themes and interdisciplinary learning to build foundational skills and international awareness. Students engage in inquiry-based projects and begin foreign language study. The Middle Years Programme (MYP) serves grades Grades 6–10. It emphasizes concept-based learning across subjects with a global context. Students continue language study, complete service hours, and undertake a capstone Personal Project in grade 10. The IB Diploma Programme (DP) serves students in Grades 11–12. It includes a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum requiring coursework across multiple disciplines, an Extended Essay, the Theory of Knowledge course, and participation in Creativity, Activity, and Community Service (CAS).¹⁰

⁷ "School Choice: STEM & STEAM." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

<https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cmsk12.org%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FPageID%3D14390> [2] "School Choice: Visual & Performing Arts." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14389> [2] "School Choice: Leadership." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14387> [2] "School Choice: Digital Marketing, Multimedia, & Design." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14395> [2] "School Choice: Law, Social Justice, and Forensic Pathology." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14397>

⁸ "School Choice: STEM & STEAM," Op. cit. [2] "School Choice: Visual & Performing Arts," Op. cit. [2] "School Choice: Leadership," Op. cit. [2] "School Choice: Digital Marketing, Multimedia, & Design," Op. cit. [2] "School Choice: Law, Social Justice, and Forensic Pathology," Op. cit.

⁹ "School Choice: World Languages and Language Immersion." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14385> [2] Ibid.

¹⁰ "School Choice: International Baccalaureate." Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14386>

ELEMENTARY GIFTED PROGRAMMING

The Learning Immersion/Talent Development (LI/TD) magnet program serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade, focusing on advanced learners and those identified as academically and/or intellectually gifted (AIG). The Learning Immersion (LI) component, for grades K–2, emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving through an enriched curriculum. In grades 3–5, students identified as AIG transition into the Talent Development (TD) program, which offers rigorous instruction tailored to gifted learners, incorporating advanced content and opportunities for independent projects. The program integrates enrichment electives and real-world learning experiences, aiming to foster academic excellence and personal growth. Students in the LI/TD program have automatic continuation into the International Baccalaureate (IB) middle school program within their transportation zone. Enrollment in the LI/TD program is completed through the school choice lottery, but entry into the TD program requires specific entry requirements, including AIG identification.¹¹

MONTESSORI PROGRAMS

CMS offers Montessori programs across grades Pre K-12. These programs offer hands-on, whole child-centered learning including multi-age classrooms. The elementary Montessori program at CMS serves students in Grades Pre K-6. Students in grades Pre K-1 can apply using the school choice lottery. Students in grades 7-10 can apply to the secondary Montessori program (Grades 7-12) through the school choice lottery. Students in other grades must complete a late entry application to be admitted to a Montessori school.¹²

EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

CMS partners with local colleges and universities to offer Early College High Schools, which blend high school and college experiences. In an early college, high school students can earn up to two years of college credit tuition free or an associate degree. These programs, known as Cooperative Innovative High Schools, feature accelerated rigorous curricula with all courses at Honors, Advanced Placement, or college level. Most CMS early college high schools begin in grade 9 and run through grade 12, with an optional “Grade 13” (a fifth year) for students to complete their college credential. Some programs, often called Middle College High Schools, start at grade 11 – these allow grade 11-12 students to attend a community college campus full-time, taking both high school and college classes in their last two years. Admission to early college high schools is through the school choice lottery system. CMS also offers programs with a focus on specific career pathways, including the Charlotte Engineering Early College and Charlotte Teacher Early College, where students can obtain an industry-specific credential.¹³

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (HISD)

Houston Independent School District (HISD) provides specialized programming through language and culture programming, college credit programming, and other specialized magnet schools.¹⁴ Enrollment for specialized programs at HISD is conducted through a school choice process. To participate in the school choice process, applicants rank 10 choices and then participate in a district-wide lottery.¹⁵ Figure 1.3 outlines the different program options available through this choice process, along with the grade levels for which the program is available.

¹¹ “School Choice: Learning Immersion & Talent Development.” Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

<https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14388> [2] “Advanced Studies: Learning Immersion / Talent Development (LI/TD).” Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/785>

¹² “School Choice: Montessori.” Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14383>

¹³ “School Choice: Middle College High Schools.” Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14398> [2]

“School Choice: Early College.” Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. <https://www.cmsk12.org/Page/14396>

¹⁴ “How to Enroll in HISD: School Choice Options.” Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/Page/31464>

¹⁵ “School Choice: K-12 Application.” Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/domain/56839>

Figure 1.3: School Choice Options at HISD

Magnet Schools CTE Magnet Schools (9-12) Vanguard (Gifted & Talented) (K-12), requires gifted identification Fine, Performing, and Visual Arts (K-12) Montessori (Pre K-12) (high school montessori is not a Magnet program) STEM & STEAM (K-12)	College Credit Programs Academic Early College High Schools (9-12) International Baccalaureate (IB) (K-12) - Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma programs Dual Credit & Dual Enrollment Futures Academies: Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) Early College HS, Architecture & Construction, and Health Science Single-Gender College Preparatory Programs (6-12)	Language & Culture Programs International Studies (6-12) Foreign Language & Cultures program (K-12) Two-Way Immersion Programs Arabic (Pre K-8) Mandarin (Pre K-8) French (Pre K-5) Spanish (Pre K-12) Transitional Bilingual Program for English Learners (English & Spanish) (Elementary only)
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Source: Houston Independent School District¹⁶

MAGNET PROGRAMS

Many specialized options at HISD are offered as magnet programs, featuring theme-based curricula with open enrollment regardless of zoned school boundaries. STEM and Arts magnet programs are available across grades K-12. Additionally, Montessori magnets are offered at the elementary and middle school levels and CTE magnet schools are available at the high school level for a variety of specific pathways such as Agriculture, Health Science, and Engineering. HISD also offers Vanguard, a magnet program with accelerated and enriched content for students who are identified as gifted or talented.¹⁷ Figure 1.4 describes each of these programs in more detail. (Note: Other college credit and language magnet programs are described in the subsequent tables.)

Figure 1.4: Magnet School Programs at HISD

MAGNET SCHOOLS	
CTE Magnet Schools can apply to a CTE program at any high school using the school choice application if that program is not offered at their zoned school. Additionally, some high schools offer full-school magnet programs focused on high demand industries. CTE high schools may have an academic matrix score requirement for entry.	Vanguard programs serve students who have been identified as gifted and/or talented in intellectual ability or creativity. Students must qualify in both reading and math on the Gifted and Talented test to qualify for a Vanguard program. Vanguard campuses offer accelerated learning to challenge students beyond their grade level.
Fine Arts Programs encourage students to explore their creative nature through music, visual arts, theatre, dance, writing and more. Students create and produce high-quality performances, publications and exhibitions that help them develop their individual talent, improve their critical-thinking skills and build their confidence as an artist. Students must audition for entry to middle and high school Fine Arts programs.	Montessori schools offer highly personalized learning to help each student develop their interests and potential. Teachers focus on developing the whole student, including academic skills, social skills, emotional growth, physical coordination and cognition. Montessori applicants for grades 3 to 12 must have prior Montessori experience.
STEM/STEAM programs create opportunities for students to develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills through real world application of science, technology, engineering and mathematical exploration. These educational experiences can create career opportunities in the medical, energy, science, technology, engineering and math professions. High School STEM programs may have an academic matrix score requirement for entry. STEAM programs are similar to STEM except they integrate the arts into the curriculum. STEAM programs help students take an engineering or design approach to real-world problem solving, building on a strong math and science foundation. High School STEAM programs have an academic matrix score requirement for entry.	

Source: Houston Independent School District¹⁸

¹⁶ "School Choice: Specialized Programs." Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/domain/56840>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: [1] Ibid. [2] "How to Enroll in HISD: School Choice Options," Op. cit.

COLLEGE CREDIT PROGRAMS

HISD offers a variety of programs that allow students to earn college credit while in high school and prepare for college and a career. Some of these programs are offered as magnet programs, while others are offered only at specific neighborhood schools. Students who participate in the International Baccalaureate Diploma program can earn college credit and participate in career-related programming. The district also offers a number of specialized high schools to prepare for college and career such as Early College High Schools, College Preparatory programs, and Futures Academies. These programs help students earn college credit and industry credentials. Some focus on specific career pathways such as the Technology (P-Tech) Early College High School, the Futures Academy of Architecture and Construction, and the Futures Academy of Health Science.¹⁹ Figure 1.5 describes these college credit programs in more detail.²⁰

Figure 1.5: College Credit Programs at HISD

COLLEGE CREDIT PROGRAMS	
Early College High Schools and College Prep Programs provide students with an opportunity to get a head start on their college degrees. Many teens are able to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously, saving them thousands of dollars in college tuition and roughly two years of study.	Futures Academies allow students to earn an associate's degree and valuable career certifications to help them land lucrative jobs in some of the region's most in-demand professions, including medicine, shipping, energy, manufacturing, and computer technology
International Baccalaureate (IB) is a globally recognized program that offers challenging educational programs for students, including the ability to take advanced courses for college credit and to qualify for an IB Diploma. Elementary and middle schools may also be authorized as IB campuses for Primary Year Programmes and Middle Years Programmes to support readiness for High School Diploma Programmes. IB high schools have an academic matrix score requirement for entry.	

Source: Houston Independent School District²¹

LANGUAGE & CULTURE PROGRAMS

HISD offers a variety of specialized programs focused on world languages and cultures. International Studies programs are offered at two magnet schools, including one Grade 6-12 international school and one high school academy for international studies. Foreign language and culture programs are offered at magnet schools from the elementary level to the high school level. HISD's dual language offerings are most common at the elementary level (K-5), with some schools even beginning in Pre-Kindergarten and others extending into middle school grades. Dual language programs in HISD currently include Spanish at many campuses, and other language programs at select magnet schools such as the Pre K-8 Arabic and Mandarin immersion schools.²² In addition to these Two-Way immersion programs, HISD also offers one-way transitional programming for English Learners to support bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Spanish. Figure 1.6 describes these language and culture programs in more detail.²³

Figure 1.6: Language & Culture Programs at HISD

LANGUAGE & CULTURE PROGRAMS	
International Studies program allows students to learn about a variety of cultures, speak different languages, and learn to use technology across the global society.	Foreign Language & Cultures programs allow students to learn and develop language skills other than English. Students will have access to a variety of language courses they can study.

¹⁹ "Magnet Programs at Jones Futures Academy." Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/Page/201811>

²⁰ "School Choice: Specialized Programs," Op. cit.

²¹ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: [1] Ibid. [2] "How to Enroll in HISD: School Choice Options," Op. cit.

²² "School Choice: Specialized Programs," Op. cit.

²³ "Multilingual Programs: Home." Houston Independent School District. <https://www.houstonisd.org/Page/31871>

Two-Way Immersion Schools instruct students in the partner language for half the instructional day and English for the other half. The goal of these schools is for students to become biliterate in English and the partner language.	Transitional Bilingual programming for English Learners have a bilingual/biliteracy program model in which students identified as English Learners are served in both English and Spanish throughout the day.
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Source: Houston Independent School District²⁴

²⁴ Figure contents quoted verbatim from: [1] “School Choice: Specialized Programs,” Op. cit. [2] “How to Enroll in HISD: School Choice Options,” Op. cit.

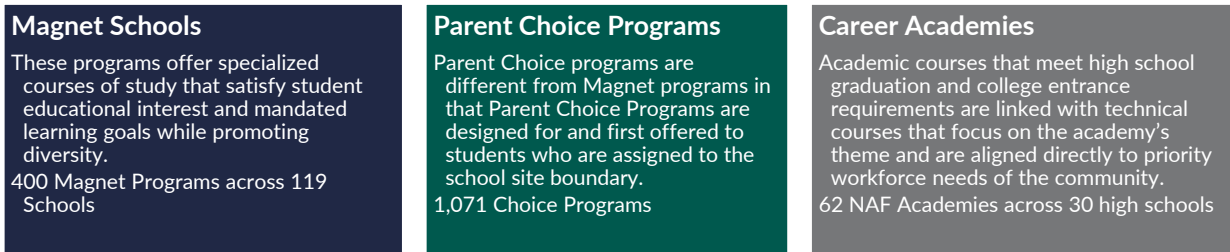
SECTION II: LARGE SUBURBAN DISTRICTS

This section profiles specialized programming at two Large Suburban districts, as classified by NCES Local Classifications.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (M-DCPS)

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is nationally recognized for its large array of specialized programming options. M-DCPS primarily offers specialized K–12 program options through magnet and choice programming. In the 2025-2026 school year, M-DCPS offers 400 magnet programs across 119 schools that are available through an open seat magnet application cycle. M-DCPS also offers 1,071 parent choice options that are available by parent choice application year-round.²⁵ The district also offers specialized programming through Career Academies, including 62 National Academy Foundation (NAF) academies across 30 schools.²⁶ In addition to these specialized programs, the district offers choice options through public-private partnerships such as charter schools and satellite learning centers.²⁷ Figure 2.1 describes the magnet, parent choice, and career academy options available at M-DCPS.

Figure 2.1: Specialty Programming Models at Miami-Dade County Public Schools

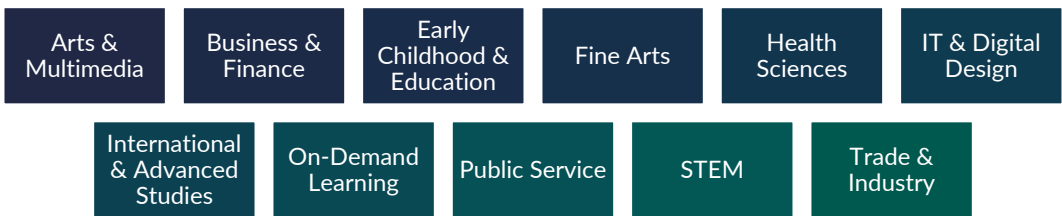


Source: Miami-Dade County Public Schools²⁸

MAGNET & PARENT CHOICE PROGRAMS

M-DCPS offers Magnet and Choice programming designed around eleven themes of study, which are outlined in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Themes of Study for Magnet & Parent Choice Programs



Source: Your Choice Miami²⁹

²⁵ “Magnet Schools (2025-2026) English Catalog.” Your Choice Miami, 2025. https://yourchoicemiami.org/files/2024/10/SCPO-MAGNET-CATALOG2024-2025-85X11_FINAL-ENG-M6.pdf [2] “Home.” Your Choice Miami. <https://yourchoicemiami.org/> [2] “Federal and State Compliance Office.” Miami-Dade County Public Schools. <https://attendanceservices.dadeschools.net/#!/fullWidth/4071>

²⁶ “School Choice Options: Career Academies.” Your Choice Miami. <https://yourchoicemiami.org/school-choice-options/career-academies/>

²⁷ “School Choice Options: Private/Public Partnerships.” Your Choice Miami. <https://yourchoicemiami.org/school-choice-options/private-public-partnerships/>

²⁸ Figure content quoted verbatim from: “Home,” Op. cit.

²⁹ Ibid.

Magnet programming at M-DCPS is available across all grade levels. In 2024, the district received 88 Magnet Schools of America Merit awards for Magnet programming.³⁰ Magnet school applications take place during one annual magnet application cycle. Applicants can select up to five schools (including one program at each school) and then participate in a lottery for random selection.³¹ Magnet programming includes options oriented around career pathways, such as Law, STEM, and Health Science magnet programs. It also includes internationally recognized programs such as IB and Cambridge International, as well as other programs focused on international language and studies.³² Figure 2.3 describes the availability of Magnet programming themes by grade level.

Figure 2.3: Magnet School Themes of Study

MAGNET SCHOOL THEMES OF STUDY		
▪ Trade & Industry (Grades 9-12) ▪ STEM (Grades K-12) ▪ Public Service (Grades 6-12) ▪ Information Technology & Digital Design (Grades 6-12) ▪ Health Sciences (Grades K-12)	▪ International & Advanced Studies (Grades K-12) ○ (PYP, MYP, & DP IB; Cambridge International; International Education/Global Focus, iPREP, etc.) ▪ Fine Arts (Grade 3-12)	▪ Early Childhood & Education (K-12) ○ Montessori (PK-5) ▪ Business & Finance (Grades 9-12) ▪ Arts & Multimedia (Grades K-12)

Source: Your Choice Miami³³

Non-magnet parent choice options are categorized around the same themes of study. However, they prioritize in-boundary students during the enrollment process and only accept out-of-boundary transfers if seats are available. To apply for Parent Choice programs, applicants can submit a choice application to a school outside of their residential boundary.³⁴

CAREER ACADEMIES & EARLY COLLEGE

Nearly all M-DCPS high schools (and some middle schools) host career academies or CTE pathway programs in fields such as information technology, engineering, biomedical sciences, finance, hospitality and tourism, aviation, automotive technology, culinary arts, and more. Many of these academies are affiliated with the National Academy Foundation (NAF), ensuring high-quality industry-aligned curriculum and internship opportunities. In 2024, M-DCPS had 62 NAF academies across 30 schools. These academies provide access to industry-specific curricula, real-world work experiences, and professional mentors from business partners in alignment with NAF standards. NAF Career Academy themes include Engineering, Finance, Health Sciences, Hospitality & Tourism, Information Technology, Other (Agriscience and Teaching).³⁵

M-DCPS also facilitates Early College High School opportunities that allow high school students to accelerate their learning and earn college credits or an associate degree while still in high school. The flagship model is the School for Advanced Studies (SAS), a nationally recognized collegiate high school program operated in partnership with Miami Dade College. SAS is a full-time dual-enrollment program in Grade 11-12; participants attend SAS on a college campus and take a combination of high school and college courses, effectively completing their last two years of high school while also earning credits toward an Associate of Arts degree. Entrance into SAS (and a similar program, the Academy for Advanced Academics at FIU) is competitive, targeting motivated and academically talented students prepared for accelerated

³⁰ “Magnet Schools (2025-2026) English Catalog,” Op. cit.
³¹ “Magnet Application Process.” Your Choice Miami. <https://yourchoicemiami.org/resources/magnet-application-process/>
³² “Magnet Schools (2025-2026) English Catalog,” Op. cit.
³³ Ibid.
³⁴ “School Choice Options: Choice Programs.” Your Choice Miami. <https://yourchoicemiami.org/school-choice-options/parent-choice-programs/>
³⁵ “School Choice Options: Career Academies,” Op. cit.

study. By graduation, many SAS students simultaneously receive their high school diploma and a two-year college degree, positioning them to enter universities as upper-level students or to save on tuition costs.³⁶ Beyond SAS, many M-DCPS high schools offer dual enrollment options and early college academies where students can take college classes through local colleges/universities.³⁷

DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS

Through the International and Advanced Studies theme, M-DCPS offers robust dual language immersion programs across several models. These programs are aimed at fostering biliteracy and bilingualism from early grades through secondary school.³⁸ Figure 2.4 describes the Extended Foreign Language (EFL), Bilingual School Organization (BISO), and International Studies (IS) program models available for dual language programming, as well as the grade levels in which these programs are offered.

Figure 2.4: Dual Languages Programs at M-DCPS

Extended Foreign Language (EFL): K-12 •The EFL program offers a school within a school approach to dual language education. The goal of the program is offer students the opportunity to become proficient in speaking, reading, and writing in English and one other language. At the elementary level the program is designed for a group of students at each grade level who after participation in the program for one school year are automatically enrolled in the subsequent grade level. The time for instruction in the several areas of study follows the norms established for all elementary schools with the addition of sixty minutes daily for language arts in the language other than English.
Bilingual School Organization (BISO): Pre K-8 •BISO schools offer a school-wide dual language program model in elementary and K-8 schools. BISO supports bilingual and biliteracy in English and an additional language, including Spanish, French, or Portuguese. The instructional model is 60% in English and 40% in the target language. Core subjects are taught in both languages. Grade 6-8 students take language and literature courses as well as a Humanities course in the target language.
International Studies (IS): K-12 •The (IS) program is offered in partnership with education ministries of France, Germany, Italy and Spain to meet U.S and E.U standards. Students pursue an academic curriculum with an international focus that addresses rigorous standards of both US and European Union (EU) educational systems. At the elementary level, students participate in an extended day model, receiving up to three hours of language instruction with core subjects in both English and the target language. At the secondary level, students continue studying literature, math, and social sciences in the target language and are encouraged to enroll in Honors and AP courses in English.

Source: Miami-Dade Public Schools³⁹

³⁶ "School for Advanced Studies (SAS)." Miami Dade College. <https://www.mdc.edu/dual-enrollment/sas-program/> [2]

"Academy for Advanced Studies – at Florida International University." Florida International University. <https://aaafiu.net/>

³⁷ "Dual Enrollment Programs." Miami-Dade County Public Schools. <https://advancedacademicprograms.dadeschools.net/#!/rightColumn/1413>

³⁸ "Department of Bilingual Education & World Languages." Miami-Dade County Public Schools. <https://bilingual.dadeschools.net/#!/fullWidth/14995>

³⁹ Figure adapted with some text quoted verbatim from: "World Language Programs." Miami-Dade County Public Schools. <https://districtartifacts.dadeschools.net/Standard%203.01/World%20Languages%20Program%20Descriptions.pdf> [2]
 "Elementary School and K-8 Center Language Program Offerings 2024-2025." Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2024. https://api.dadeschools.net/WMSFiles/181/pdf/WL/Language_Offerings_2024-2025_v4.pdf

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MCPS)

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) typically offers regional and countywide specialty programming through criteria-based and interest-based application processes. At the elementary and middle school levels, criteria-based programs may use a central review program to universally screen students and identify students who are eligible for a criteria-based lottery. At the high school level, students may need to meet specific criteria for program entry with applications, portfolios, or other academic criteria. Some consortia programs offer a “choice” admissions process. Applicants select preferred schools within the consortium and participate in a lottery process. Students who are within the boundary of the consortium are required to enroll through the choice process. Out-of-boundary students are also open to participate in the lottery process. Other interest-based programs, such as immersion programs, also use a lottery when applications exceed capacity.⁴⁰ Figure 2.5 describes these regional and countywide admissions options.

Figure 2.5: Regional & Countywide Specialty Programming at MCPS

Middle and Elementary School Criteria-Based •Some competitive programs with a limited number of seats require that students meet specific criteria as determined by a central review of data and be invited through a criteria based lottery.	High School Criteria-Based •Some competitive programs with a limited number of seats require that students complete an application and meet specific admissions criteria. This may include a written application or the submission of additional materials such as a portfolio. Some programs accept students countywide, while others accept students from designated regions of the county. They are called “criteria based.”	Consortia/Choice •MCPS has one middle school and two high school Consortia programs that allow students to choose which of several schools in a specific geographic area they are interested in attending. Consortia schools also offer specialty courses related to a particular theme or career area. Through the Choice process, students and their parents complete a form identifying their school preference. While most students get their first choice, it is not guaranteed.	Interest-Based Lottery •A lottery may be held to determine admission to a interest based programs when applicants exceed program capacity. They are called “interest based”. Example: Immersion programs.
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Source: Montgomery County Public Schools⁴¹

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Elementary special programming includes lottery-based language immersion programs for Grades K-5 and criteria-based centers for enriched studies for Grades 4-5. World language immersion programs are offered in eight elementary schools, with enrollment based on the high school cluster for most schools. Some schools are open to students from all high school clusters, while others are open to students from select clusters. The program uses a lottery admissions process that includes sibling preference and economic status, among other factors. Nine regional Centers for Enriched Studies typically enroll students based on their high school clusters through a criteria-based admissions process. Students do not need to apply to the program but are universally considered in Grade 3 using academic performance criteria. Figure 2.6 provides details for each of these elementary special programs.

⁴⁰ “Options: An Introduction to Application, Choice, Immersion, and Magnet Programs.” Montgomery County Public Schools, 2024. https://drive.google.com/file/d/17JONljJEpiYIB8ZISHZff1dI8DrBGMDa/preview?usp=embed_facebook [2] “The Choice Process for the Downcounty Consortium.” Montgomery County Public Schools. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/school-info/downcounty/choice/>

⁴¹ “About Admissions to Special Programs.” Montgomery County Public Schools. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/specialprograms/admissions/> [2] “K-12 Regional/Countywide Programs.” Montgomery County Public Schools. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/specialprograms/>

Figure 2.6: Elementary School Special Programs

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	GRADES	ENROLLMENT	ADMISSIONS
World Language Immersion Programs	Two-way Immersion programs (Spanish-English) at six schools that follow a 50/50 model, also One-Way Immersion programs in French and Chinese (partial immersion).	K-5	3 schools Serve students from all high school clusters. 2 schools serve students from select high school clusters. 2 schools serve students who attend a specific elementary school but are open to students from all high school clusters, based on space availability.	Interest-Based Lottery for Grades K-1
Elementary Center for Enriched Studies	Two-year program designed to meet the needs of gifted and motivated learners in language arts, science, and social studies.	Grades 4-5	9 schools organized by geographic regions aligned to high school clusters, with some exceptions.	Central Review, Criteria-Based Selection All Grade 3 students will be centrally reviewed for literacy enrichment and acceleration.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools⁴²

MIDDLE SCHOOL SPECIAL PROGRAMS

At the middle school level, MCPS offers three types of special programming that use interest-based lotteries and criteria-based applications or screening. Middle school language immersion programs are typically offered for students who completed immersion programs in elementary school, although there may be a limited number of seats for additional students who can pass a language test. Only some schools provide transportation to central stops, and others provide only local transportation.

The Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) is made up of three magnet schools, each with a unique focus. All students who live within the attendance areas of these schools automatically participate in a choice program lottery to attend one of these schools. Other interested students from outside these areas may also apply to participate in the lottery. Transportation from neighborhood bus stops is available for in-consortium students, but only limited transportation from central stops is available for students who reside outside the consortium attendance area. Four other magnet schools have a criteria-based admissions process. All grade 5 students are screened for this program through a central review process to identify those eligible for enriched programming. Students who are identified as eligible are then submitted to a lottery for the school based on their geographic area. Figure 2.7 further describes the enrollment and admission for each of these middle school special programs.

Figure 2.7: Middle School Special Programs

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ADMISSIONS	ADMISSIONS
Language Immersion Continuation Programs	Continuation programs are available for students who completed elementary Chinese, French, and Spanish immersion programs.	8 schools offer immersion continuation programs in feeder schools based on completion of elementary school immersion programs. Other students may participate if space is available, contingent upon invitation.	Criteria-Based Admission to the World Languages immersion programs is limited to incoming Grade 6 students who have completed a corresponding immersion program at the elementary level. Students who did not participate may test into immersion programs if there is space available.

⁴² Content adapted with some quoted verbatim from: Figure adapted with some text quoted verbatim from: "Options: An Introduction to Application, Choice, Immersion, and Magnet Programs," Op. cit., pp. 7–8.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ADMISSIONS	ADMISSIONS
Middle School Magnet Programs	Magnet programs in Math/Science/Computer Science or Humanities and Communication provide enrichment and acceleration.	2 magnet schools offer Math/Sci/Comp Sci programs and 2 offer Humanities/Communication programs that are open to all students, based on high school clusters.	Central Review, Criteria-Based, Lottery Math and Humanities programs review all Grade 5 related to grades, scores, reading level, and special services. Identified students are placed in a lottery pool for regional seats.
Middle School Magnet Consortium	A consortium of three themed magnet schools centered on Digital Design, Arts, and Aerospace Tech with accelerated core curriculum.	Accepts students who live within the consortium attendance area (In-consortium) and is also open to out-of-consortium students.	Interest-Based Lottery Admission is based on a choice process open to all Grade 5 students in-consortium and out-of-consortium. In-consortium students must participate in the choice process, while out-of-consortium students may apply to participate in the choice process

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools⁴³

The Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) is open to students within and outside of the attendance area of the three MSMC middle schools through an interest-based lottery. The original goal of the MSMC program was to increase academic performance and program choices and reduce socioeconomic isolation in the three target schools within the consortium. The three middle schools are whole-school magnets that each have a distinct instructional focus, including computer science and digital design, creative and performing arts, and science and technology. Each of the three schools offers accelerated core curricula, specialized courses, extended learning opportunities, and collaborative partnerships with business and community organizations.⁴⁴

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

High School Special Programs include a wide range of interest-based and criteria-based application programs. Two regional consortia offer programs through a choice program lottery for students within and outside of the consortia region. This program offers transportation to most students who live in the consortium area. Many schools offer regional or countywide application programs that have either criteria- or lottery-based applications. Admissions and transportation processes vary widely across these programs. MCPS also offers a range of part-time and full-time college and career readiness programs. Some of these programs offer courses offsite in partnership with local colleges and training facilities. These programs are interest-based and use a lottery if they receive more applicants than available seats. Transportation and prerequisite requirements vary across these programs. Figure 2.8 further describes the enrollment and admission processes for each of these high school special programs.

⁴³ Figure adapted with some text quoted verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 12–17.

⁴⁴ “Middle School Magnet Consortium.” Montgomery County Public Schools.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xfiu9iqEIYWrK5GxzK1PBx5tQnTaEluu/preview?usp=embed_facebook

Figure 2.8: High School Special Programs

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ENROLLMENT	ADMISSIONS
Choice Programs: Northeast Consortia & Downcounty Consortia	Northeast Consortia schools each offer a signature program (Fine Arts & Humanities, Science & Media, and IB World & IT). Downcounty consortia schools offer a variety of academies at each school with smaller learning communities.	Two separate consortia areas made up of 8 total school sites that are open to students within the consortium area and to out-of-consortium students.	Interest-Based Lottery Admission is based on a choice process open to all Grade 8 students in-consortium and out-of-consortium. In-consortium students must participate in the choice process, while out-of-consortium students may apply to participate in the choice process.
Regional/ Countywide Application & Magnet Programs	9 high schools provide application and/or magnet programs (ie, Visual Arts, IB, Leadership, Science). One is a whole magnet school that offers three different houses (ecology, humanities, and STEM). 11 high schools provide lottery-based programs (e.g. Aviation, Agriculture, Project Lead the Way) More information about themes available in the High School Regional/Countywide Application Programs At-A-Glance (Grade 8) .	Some of these programs are regional while others are countywide.	Criteria-/Lottery-Based Applications Application processes and criteria vary across programs.
Countywide College & Career Programs	Countywide career high schools offer a variety of career pathways, some have specific focus (e.g. Technology, STEM, Apprenticeship) More information about themes is available in the High School Regional/Countywide Application Programs At-A-Glance (Grades 9-11) .	8 college & career programs are open to students across the county.	Interest-Based Lottery Application processes and criteria vary across programs. Some programs require prerequisites.

Source: Montgomery County Public Schools⁴⁵

MCPS offers two high school consortia: the Downcounty Consortium (DCC) containing five high schools and the Northeast Consortium (NEC) containing three high schools. Students who live within the attendance area of the consortium schools or attend feeder middle schools are eligible to attend a consortium high school by submitting a choice form.⁴⁶ Each school within the two consortia offers signature programs or academies designed around central themes that aim to make connections between academics, interests, and college and career options. The choice process applies only to the school's comprehensive high school curriculum and "signature program." Students must still submit an application for application-only, criteria-based programs housed within these schools.

⁴⁵ Figure adapted with some text quoted verbatim from: [1] "Options: An Introduction to Application, Choice, Immersion, and Magnet Programs," Op. cit., pp. 19–27. [2] "HS Programs At a Glance Fall 2024 (Grade 8)." Montgomery County Public Schools, November 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kww20_552tnY8jPTKhnl04ZxBF-m66zk6RPJOea8R0/edit?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook [2] "Fall 2024 MCPS Gr 9-11 Programs At A Glance, Eligibility and Open House Dates." Montgomery County Public Schools, 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1onvWPD9apFV6WX1MljmrXewi6vt6OcJGUu6-3o-Lo1s/edit?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook [2] "9-11 of Regional/Countywide FAQs Admission 2024-2025." Montgomery County Public Schools, 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1u8ztGHlxO1q2nRHwz0EkmwsiTYtgzjYXLufK3JtC-z8/preview?usp=embed_facebook

⁴⁶ "Options: An Introduction to Application, Choice, Immersion, and Magnet Programs," Op. cit., pp. 23–24.

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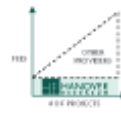
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