SEMCOG Quick Facts

September 2012

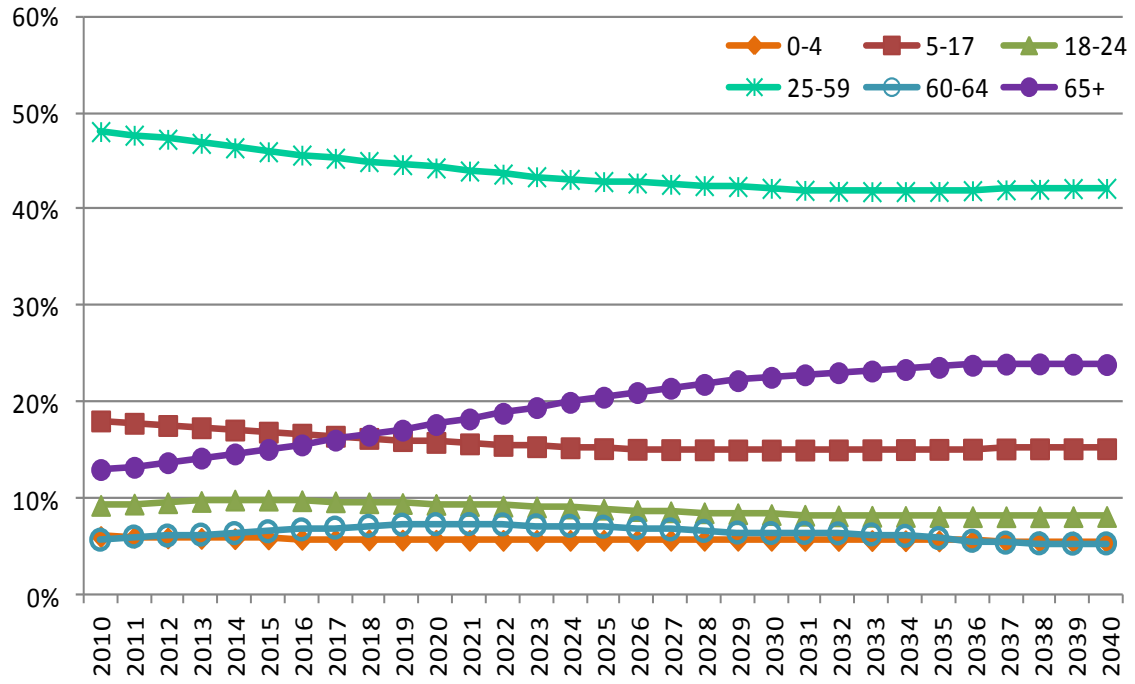
SEMCOG 2040 Forecast, Population by Age Group by School District

In April 2012, SEMCOG released its 2040 Forecast, and subsequently released several reports highlighting the changing demographic patterns in the region. The reports drew attention to the fact that our senior population will expand significantly in the coming decades due to the aging of the baby boomers. This report continues SEMCOG's analysis of future demographic trends in the region. It provides forecast data by eight age groups – pre-school population (0-4), school-age population (5-17), college-bound (18-24), working-age (25-34 and 35-59), pre-seniors (60-64), and seniors (65-74, and 75+) for all school districts in Southeast Michigan. Particularly, it provides insight into future change patterns in the region's school-age population.

Key demographic trends affecting public schools

Southeast Michigan, along with the nation, faces an aging baby boomer population, whose influence on demographic trends continues to affect various age groups (Figure 1). While the baby boomers themselves are driving the dramatic increases in senior age groups, the share of working-age population is declining in the coming decades. Since this group also includes the prime childbearing-age women, it is reasonable to expect a continued decrease in youth population in the next few decades.

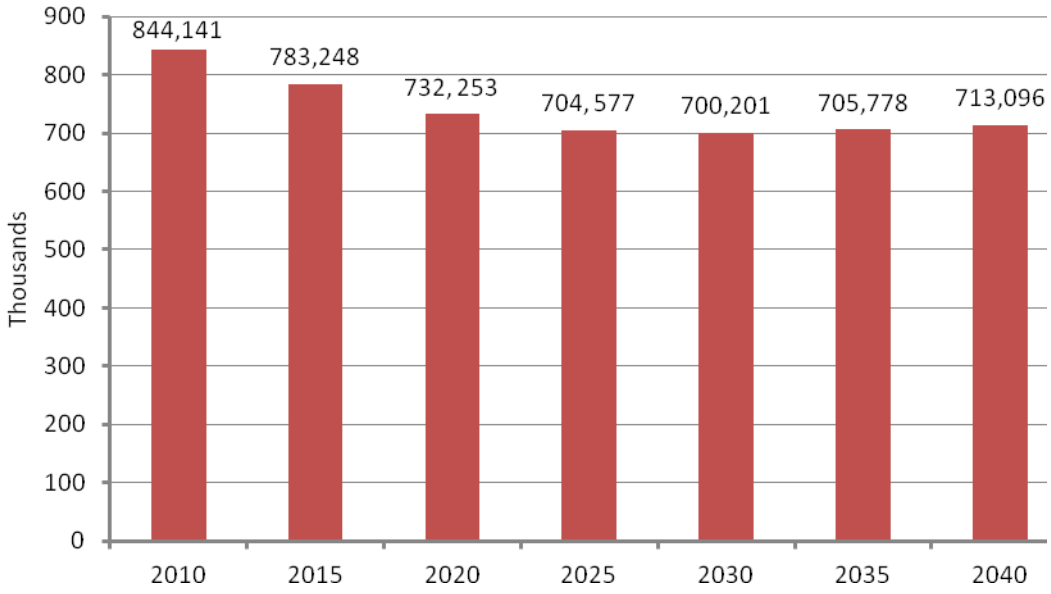
Figure 1
Population change by age groups, Southeast Michigan, 2010-2040



Southeast Michigan's youth – Past, present, and future

In just 10 years, Southeast Michigan will have 112,000 (or 13 percent), fewer school-age children (ages 5-17) in its seven intermediate school districts (ISDs). Beyond 2020, the rate of decline in this age group will likely slow down significantly until 2030, at which point there will be a slight rebound in the trend. By 2040, there will be approximately 713,000 school-aged children in all school districts combined in the region – a greater than 15 percent decrease over the current size (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Region's school district population forecast, age 5 to 17, 2010-2040

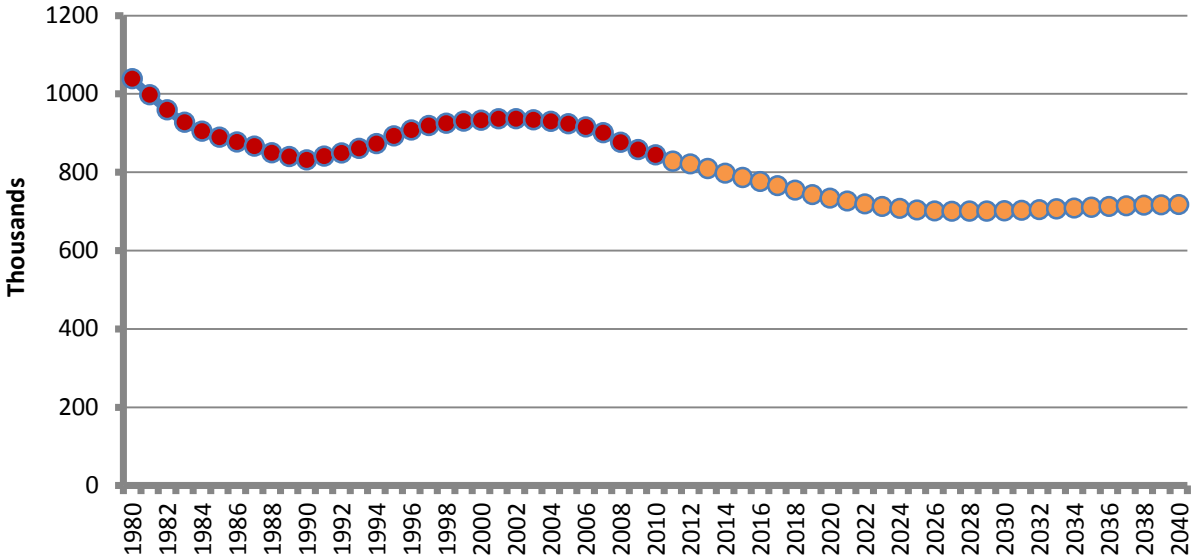


Two primary factors determine the change in school-age population – the number of children born and migration. Figure 3 shows the fluctuation of school-age population in Southeast Michigan driven by those factors. School age population declined between 1980 and 1990, as the last baby boomers passed through this age group in the early 1980s, and more people moved out of the region. A rebound was witnessed in the 1990s as a result of the "baby boom echo" – a larger number of childbearing women and higher birth rates around 1990. Meanwhile, the healthy economy, led by the auto industry, attracted more people to the region.

That trend has changed in the first decade of the 21st Century. Fewer children were born as the youngest baby boomers aged out of the prime childbearing years. As these older cohorts continue to age and are replaced by the younger groups, the region will see a dip in school-age children. This is not unique to Southeast Michigan. Both the state and national share of school-age population is expected to shrink in the coming decades (Interim Projections of the Population, U. S. Census Bureau) as a result of the aging population. However, increasing out-migration from Southeast Michigan in recent years accelerated the decline in school-age population in the region.

Between 2000 and 2010, the region lost more than 350,000 people to net out-migration, most of which occurred during the later part of the decade. Between 2005 and 2009, the region lost an average of 45,000 people per year. While the rate of out-migration is slowing down in the region, migration is generally a function of economic opportunity; future patterns of school-age population will, in part, depend on the region's ability to grow economically.

Figure 3
History and forecast of school age population, Southeast Michigan

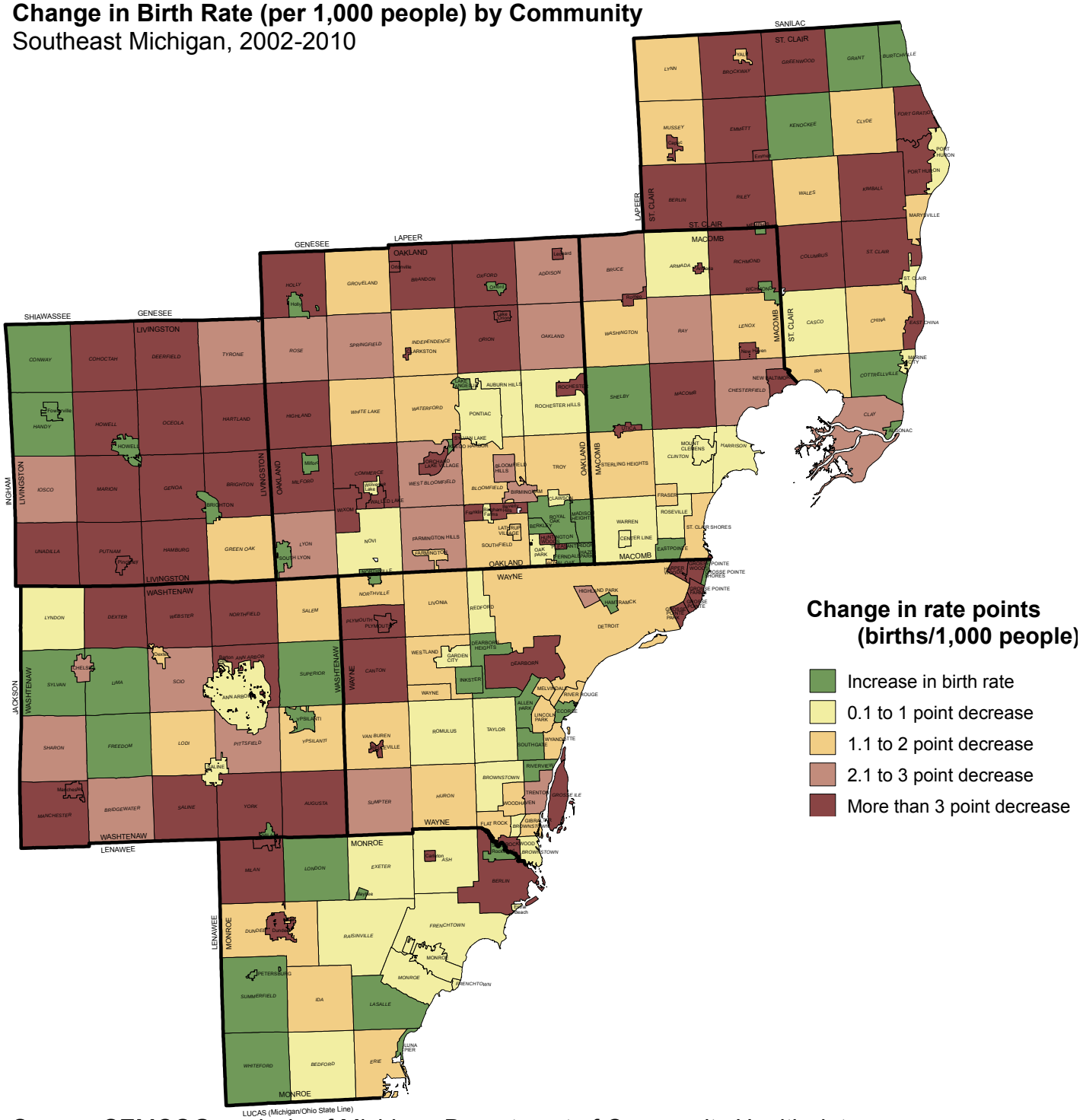


Community patterns

During the 2000s, the region's 45-and-over population grew by 18 percent, while its under-45 population declined by 13 percent. Fewer births resulted in declining school enrollments. Birth rates in the region dropped from 14.0 births per 1,000 people in 2000, to 11.2 births per 1,000 people in 2010, resulting in a decline of 17 percent in population aged 0 to 10 years.

While all parts of the region are witnessing these trends of aging and reduced birth rates, the patterns differ among individual communities and school districts. Many of the outlying and rural counties are seeing greater reductions in number of births compared to urban, inner-ring communities; particularly, several communities in Livingston, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and the northwestern part of Oakland County experienced a decline of more than two points in their birth rate between 2002 and 2010. Of the 233 communities in the region, only 33 communities (14 percent) experienced some gains in number of births in the last decade (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Change in Birth Rate (per 1,000 people) by Community
Southeast Michigan, 2002-2010



Source: SEMCOG analysis of Michigan Department of Community Health data

By 2020, all seven intermediate school districts in the region will see additional declines in enrollment. Wayne Regional Education Services Agency is expected to experience the greatest decline – 18 percent (60,000 children) between 2010 and 2020. Following are the expected declines in the other county intermediate school districts:

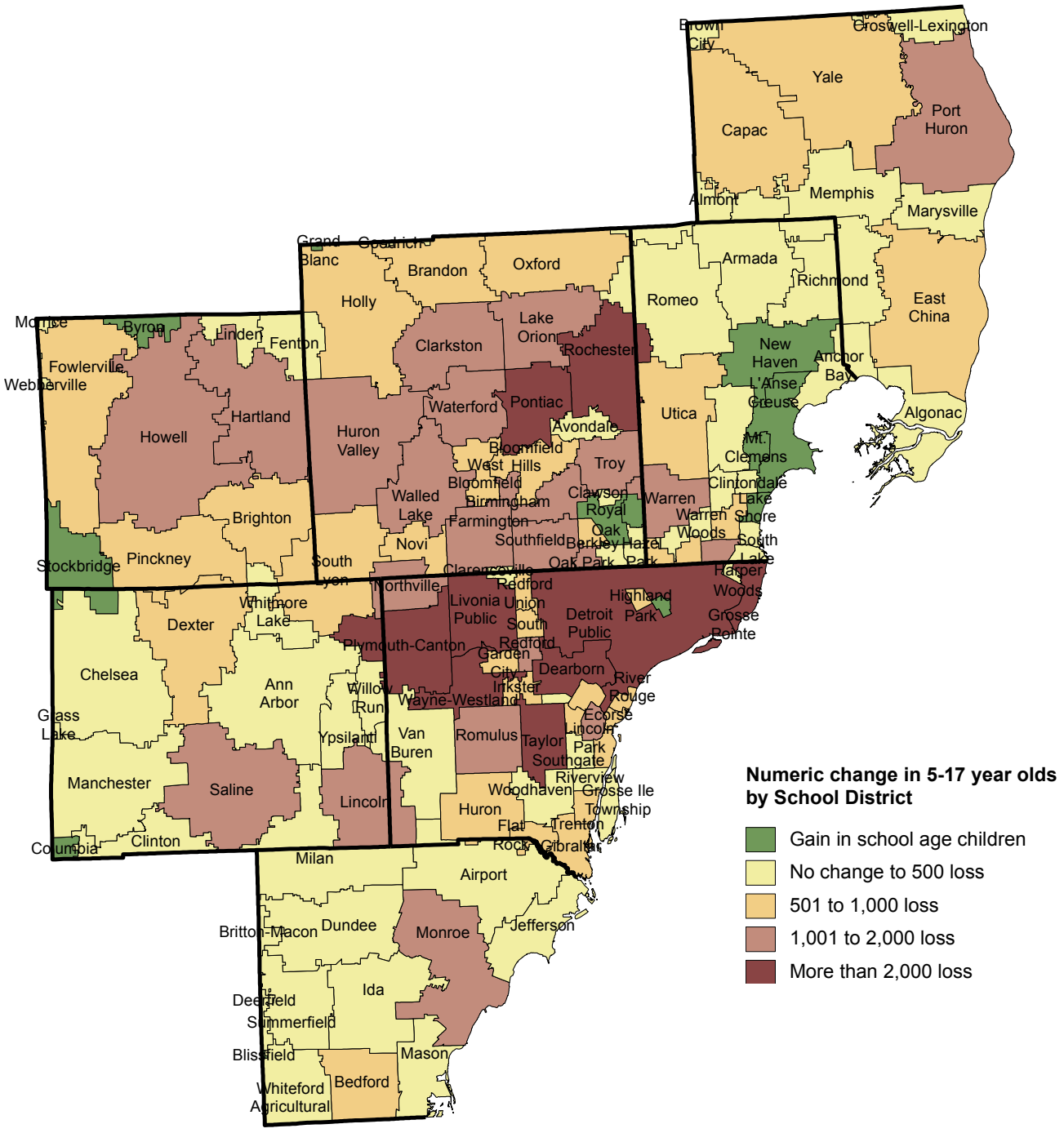
- St. Clair ISD – 17 percent decline;
- Livingston Education Services Agency – 16 percent decline;
- Monroe ISD – 14 percent decline;
- Oakland Schools – 12 percent decline;
- Washtenaw ISD – nine percent decline; and
- Macomb ISD – five percent decline.

At the individual school district level, all but seven of the 114 school districts in the region are forecasted to experience declines in school-age children between 2010 to 2020 (Figure 5). For many districts these declines will continue until 2030, at which point the region as a whole is expected to see a rebound in 5-to-17-year-old population. However, the growth is projected to be less than 13,000 (1.8 percent) in the 10 years between 2030 and 2040.

Conclusion

In all communities across Southeast Michigan, the trend of declining school-age population will have serious impacts on school enrollments and, consequently, on school facility and resource planning. Beyond school enrollments, shifting age dynamics will require communities to focus their planning efforts beyond their local school grounds. Most of these communities are also the ones experiencing rapid increases in their senior population, requiring greater attention to planning for changes in social-service delivery, health-care availability, and recreation opportunities, among other issues related to an aging population.

Figure 5
Change in School Age Population by School District
Southeast Michigan, 2010-2020



Source: SEMCOG 2040 Forecast