

BY KATRINA MULLEN

New from the Richmond Fed's Regional Matters blog

McCord, Roisin, and Laura Dawson Ullrich. "Community College Enrollment in Fall 2020: What We Know So Far."

Unlike in past recessions, community college enrollment in fall 2020 decreased, especially among minority male students. (See "Male Labor Force Participation: Patterns and Trends," *Econ Focus*, First Quarter 2021.) The Fifth District followed similar trends nationally, with enrollment declining anywhere from 4.3 percent in Maryland to as much as 17.4 percent in West Virginia. Two community colleges in Virginia, however, experienced a different pattern. Germanna Community College in the Fredericksburg area and Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge not only provided students with timely, organized transitions to online or hybrid learning, but also offered "wraparound" services such as government aid and benefits programs.

Kosakow, Jason. "Regional Businesses Returning to Pre-COVID-19 Operations."

Many businesses in the Fifth District, like in much of the country, closed their doors and shifted to remote work when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The Richmond Fed's business surveys in May suggested that increased vaccination rates and lifted restrictions contributed to the return that month of some on-site work and business-related travel. According to the surveys, nearly all firms within the manufacturing and service sectors think employees will have the option to work on-site by the end of the year. Additionally, since firms believe remote work has largely been successful, many are expecting remote or hybrid work to continue or increase.

Norris, Stephanie, and Peter M. Dolkart. "Is Rental Assistance Getting to Those in Need?"

Between December 2020 and March 2021, Congress allocated \$46.6 billion toward households struggling to pay rent or utilities. States in the Fifth District, including the District of Columbia, received \$4.3 billion in emergency rental assistance for the most hard-hit areas. While state and local governments can disperse the funds through new or existing programs, many have been slow to act due to administrative hurdles and staffing needs. For example, North Carolina repurposed its Office of Recovery and Resiliency, originally created for hurricane housing support, to focus on rental relief. The office more than tripled its staff but still could not keep up with the large backlog.

Taylor, Sam Louis. "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds: How Do They Work and What Does It Mean to the Fifth District?"

The American Rescue Plan, enacted by Congress in March, includes the \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to support states, counties, territories, tribes, and local

governments with their economic recovery. Funding within the Fifth District varies by type: \$19.1 billion for states and the District of Columbia, and \$11.5 billion for municipalities. Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina are the only states within the district to have released detailed proposals ranging from increasing funding for unemployment services to investing in schools and closing the digital divide.

Mengedoth, Joseph, and Alexander Nikolov. "Eyes on the Roads (and Bridges) in the Fifth District."

Over the last decade, roadway quality in the Fifth District has generally declined while bridge quality has generally improved. In fiscal 2020, nearly 2,100 projects in the

district, not including the District of Columbia, received federal funds. Less than half of the total cost of these projects, however, was covered by federal dollars. In South Carolina, federal dollars accounted for only 30 percent of total costs, while in West Virginia it was 77 percent. Overall, the majority of federal funding in the district went toward reconstructing and repairing existing infrastructure, followed by expanding existing capacity and constructing new roads or highways.

Marré, Alexander, and Alexander Nikolov. "Rural Spotlight: Bringing Broadband to Maryland's Eastern Shore."

Maryland's Eastern Shore is one of many rural communities that relies on electric cooperatives for access to broadband internet service. While rural broadband is expensive, one study found that without access to high-speed broadband, consumers lose nearly \$23 billion in economic benefits each year. In the first article of the Rural Spotlight series, the Richmond Fed's Regional and Community Analysis team highlighted Choptank Electric Service, an electrical cooperative with an 80-plus year history that has evolved to include a broadband subsidiary, Choptank Fiber. With broadband in high demand along Maryland's Eastern Shore, Choptank used its relationships, employees, and resources — and connected its first customer this spring. **EF**

