

# Chamblee Cluster

## DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

### Engagement Series #1

#### *Executive Summary Report*

Thursday, September 10, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:45 PM

### Meeting Overview

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This first Community Advisory Team meeting for the Chamblee Cluster was focused on listening, learning, and gathering feedback. As with other cluster meetings, no attendance boundary proposals or draft scenarios were presented for review; this was the first of three meetings in the series, with the next meeting scheduled for October 1 and a third on October 29.

The meeting was facilitated by United Way, with KW Green Consulting serving as the scribe and documentation team responsible for accurately capturing and analyzing community input. Facilitators emphasized throughout that no decisions have been made at this point and that the CAT's role is advisory. District representatives present explained that community input collected tonight will inform a set of options and a third CAT meeting will focus on recommendations. Ultimately one or two possible plans will be submitted to the Superintendent, who will make a recommendation to the Board.

The meeting followed the agenda of welcome and orientation, small-group discussion, report-out and theme identification, and closing reflection. The facilitator did not address the guiding principles section, but the scribes' captured groups who mentioned it in their remarks. Discussion ran long, and several parents and members began leaving around 7:30 PM while conversation was still underway; many of those who stayed continued discussing topics among themselves after the meeting formally ended. The meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

### Participation Summary

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Participants were organized into small-group tables. Participants were mostly parents, along with staff, volunteers, community members, and education professionals with experience across elementary, middle, and high school levels. The scribe observed that many members, particularly mothers, appeared to already know one another and to have existing outside communication groups, suggesting a tightly networked parent community. Members asked for introductions from DeKalb County representatives, staff, and consultants in the room, and multiple members sought clarity on the roles of people present who were not CAT members themselves. Side conversations continued at several tables during the report-out portion, and concern was raised about low attendance relative to the number of interested individuals who had been waitlisted.

## Major Themes

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Overcrowding was a leading concern, particularly at the elementary level, with participants tying class size directly to strained teacher-student relationships and stretched resources. One table specifically connected overcrowding to more resources being redirected to students who previously lacked them. Facility conditions were closely linked to this theme, including a specific call for renovations at Huntley Hills, reports of broken air conditioning, and a question about whether school buildings are generally fit to serve everyone. Transportation surfaced repeatedly, both as a standalone concern and as a complication for families with multiple children attending different schools, who described difficulty managing transportation, traffic, and community ties simultaneously.

Program equity and access were a recurring focus. Specifically, participants wanted greater access to and transparency about the magnet-school track within DeKalb and at Chamblee specifically. They asked whether the gap in access was increasing year over year and wanted more gifted and honors opportunities for students outside of magnet schools. Equitable practices for ESOL and gifted learners and expanded Pre-K access for underprivileged schools were named directly by at least one table. Preservation of community was a strong value throughout, especially for families who specifically purchased homes to be near a particular school. Several participants noted that schools like Chamblee High School carry name recognition that families have built plans around. Participants repeatedly asked that neighborhoods and school-based communities, including specific grade cohorts, be kept together rather than partially uprooted.

Process transparency and decision-making authority were dominant themes, emphasized considerably in the closing discussion. Participants wanted to know who is developing plans and whether those developers have relevant construction and K–12 expertise. They asked whether underlying data is accurate and whether the process is top-down or genuinely community-driven. Inquiries about where funding would come from, and who ultimately makes final decisions were also made. District representatives clarified in the moment that no decisions have been made. They further clarified that the current phase is about presenting what is possible alongside what the community is saying and that operations staff involved in this work numbers roughly four to eight people. Several participants pressed further on whether a change in Superintendent could affect or delay the process. They wanted to know when leadership decisions would be made. They also asked whether policy consultants involved have ties to particular clusters.

## Key Concerns

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- Overcrowding, especially in elementary classrooms, and its effect on teacher-student relationships, class size, and available resources.
- Facility conditions, including a specific need for renovations at Huntley Hills and reports of broken air conditioning in some buildings.
- Whether the data underlying decisions is accurate and current, and whether the year-over-year gap in program access is growing.
- Limited access to the magnet-school track within DeKalb and at Chamblee specifically, and a desire for more gifted/honors options outside magnet schools.
- Disruption to established, community-based schools and school identity, particularly for families who chose their home specifically to be near a given school (with Chamblee High School's name recognition cited as an example).

- Partial disruption of specific grade cohorts (e.g., a portion of a single grade being reassigned) rather than keeping groups of students together.
- Transportation and logistics burdens for families with children spread across multiple schools.
- Uncertainty about who is developing the plans, their relevant expertise, and whether the process is top-down or community-driven.
- Lack of clarity on funding sources for any proposed changes or facility improvements.
- Whether school and facility staff, who experience these issues daily, are included in the conversation alongside parents, and whether staff will have a voice in final decisions.
- Concern that discussion has stayed too broad and generalized, without a chance to weigh in on specific programs, scenarios, or solutions.
- Uncertainty about how much real influence the CAT's feedback and recommendations will have on final decisions, including specific doubt about whether input shared tonight would be relayed accurately to decision-makers.
- Whether a change in Superintendent could affect or delay the timeline, since one or two resulting plans will ultimately go to the Superintendent for a recommendation to the Board.

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## Areas of Consensus

Although the live guiding-principles exercise was skipped, Jackson's review of written member input found broad agreement on the same core principles: active listening, respectful and open dialogue, transparency, and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to contribute. Members specifically emphasized equal representation across schools, communities, cultures, and student populations, including ELL/ESOL, special education, and gifted learners, along with clear communication, access to accurate data, timely meeting reminders, and assurance that feedback is genuinely heard and considered.

On defining success, participants converged on wanting transparency, clear timelines, and honest communication about how decisions will be made and how community feedback will influence outcomes. There was shared interest in access to decision-makers, relevant data, budgets, programs, and options before anything is finalized, and agreement that success means seeing feedback reflected in visible, responsive, and equitable action not simply having input collected. Several participants said the process felt broad, generalized, and repetitive of past engagement efforts that produced "nothing different, only more voices."

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## Diverse Perspectives

Engagement levels varied by table: several groups surfaced detailed, distinct concerns tied to specific schools (Montgomery Elementary, Chamblee Middle, Chamblee High), while at least one table reported that its major concerns had already been covered elsewhere. Reactions to the process itself also differed. Some members described feeling energized and constructive, focused on requesting specific data (CCRPI, demographic, free/reduced lunch, transportation, and bus-driver capacity information) to inform future discussion, while others described feeling "defeated," called the meeting a waste of time, and said it felt like the process was simply being repeated without producing anything new.

Parents were clearly frustrated and at times visibly angry about the perceived lack of transparency and doubt over whether their voices would matter before decisions are made. One exchange captured a parent directly challenging a district representative's claim that all data would be shared with parents,

telling them “You didn't ask that question.” Views also differed on format. Some participants wanted decision-makers physically present at future meetings and staff given a direct voice in decisions, while facilitators maintained that a neutral, third-party facilitation structure was intentional and that every engagement meeting would include focus groups as an additional channel for feedback.

## Questions Raised

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- Who is developing the plans, and do they have relevant expertise in construction and working with K–12 students?
- Is the underlying data accurate, and is the process timeline realistic? What data or information has affected decisions so far?
- When will proposals/options be available for CAT members to review, and what happens at the second and third meetings?
- Will faculty and staff be involved in making these decisions, and were staff opinions solicited alongside parents?
- How will students be supported if they are moved away from their current teachers?
- Will the process look at boundaries top-down or build from community/bottom-up input, and will maps or redrawn lines be shared next, and for which schools?
- How many people are on the district's operations staff working on this project? (District representatives answered: roughly four to eight.)
- How will these plans be affected if there is a change in Superintendent, and when will that be decided?
- How is tonight's broad, general discussion informing the CAT's work? Will the specific input shared tonight be shared accurately with the decision-making team?
- What is the purpose of the CAT if this feels like a listening exercise? How will every school in the cluster be represented going forward?
- Will additional feedback on potential plans and specific scenarios be solicited later? What is the mechanism for sharing it?
- Can the district provide demographic, CCRPI, and services data (free/reduced lunch, transportation, etc.) for schools to support equity discussions, especially for learners with greater needs?
- Why weren't reminder emails sent ahead of this meeting? Will make-up outreach (e.g., phone calls) reach those who missed a prior meeting?

## Additional Observations

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- Several parents and members began leaving around 7:30 PM while discussion was still underway; most who stayed continued talking amongst themselves after the meeting ended.
- A prior CAT-related meeting was referenced as having occurred the preceding Tuesday, with phone-call outreach planned for those who missed it
- Members requested CCRPI and demographic data for all schools, including cultural/demographic makeup, free and reduced-price lunch participation, transportation needs, and bus-driver capacity, to better understand individual school needs.