

Lakeside Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #1

Executive Summary Report

Tuesday, September 8, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:42 PM

Meeting Overview

This first Community Advisory Team series focuses on listening, learning, and gathering feedback for the DeKalb County School District's (DCSD) Student Assignment Project. At this stage, there are no student assignment concepts, attendance boundary proposals, or draft options for the community to review; those concepts will be developed later and are expected to be introduced during the next CAT series later this month. The Community Advisory Team does not make final decisions regarding attendance areas. The goal is to hear as many voices, experiences, ideas, concerns, and priorities as possible, so that the individuals responsible for developing future options have a clear understanding of community perspectives and considerations.

Meeting Summary:

- United Way facilitated the session, and two members of KW Green Consulting served as the scribe/documentation team.
- Participants at the Lakeside High School Cluster were intentionally seated with representatives from different school clusters to encourage a districtwide perspective and were asked to consider the needs of the broader community rather than advocating solely for their own individual school.
- The session followed a format of large-group orientation, small-group discussion (10 tables) on guiding questions about members' perspectives, concerns, and desired outcomes, a full-group report-out and theme identification, and co-creation of guiding principles and working norms.
- Two agenda items, “Defining Success” and “Next Steps/Preview of Session #2,” were reached only briefly, with limited full-group discussion before the meeting concluded.

Participation Summary

- Out of 80 registered participants, attendance across the session ranged from approximately 34 to 58 depending on the count taken.
- Participants identified themselves by their relationship to the district, including parents, a resident and teacher, principals and school advisory council members, and other community members, as well as, where applicable, the school cluster they represented.
- Ten small groups discussed their perspectives and reported out on themes, concerns, and questions to the full group.

Major Themes

- Transportation and long travel distances, particularly routes crossing I-85.

- Overcrowding at the high school level and lack of clarity on what specific problem redistricting is meant to solve.
- Preserving neighborhood schools and community cohesion.
- Transparency and clarity of data used for enrollment, capacity, and boundary decisions.
- Equitable access to specialized programs, including dual-language immersion, STEM, gifted, and special education services.
- Trust in the district and its decision-making process.
- Academic achievement, particularly reading and math outcomes, and access to tutoring and after-school support.

Key Concerns

- Participants said the county has not provided enough information to evaluate proposed changes, and that key terms in the guiding principles, such as “transportation” and the distinction between “special education” and “special services,” need clearer definitions.
- Long bus rides across I-85 were described as unacceptable, with particular concern for the impact on special education students who may face especially long rides.
- Several participants said it remains unclear what specific problem the district is trying to solve, and that overcrowding is concentrated at the high school level rather than being an elementary redistricting issue.
- The data used to support proposed changes was repeatedly described as unclear, unvalidated, and not transparent.
- Participants noted that some families enroll in private school through elementary or middle school and return to public school for high school, which they said contributes to high school over-enrollment in ways not reflected in current data.
- The absence of a permanent superintendent and director of student assignment was raised as a reason decisions feel rushed and lacks clear leadership.
- Engagement and representation of Spanish-speaking families in the process was described as inadequate.
- Safety concerns included classroom trailers described as old and unsafe rather than temporary, and late buses disrupting first-period instruction.
- Participants noted that schools across the district do not operate on a uniform schedule, with some using block scheduling and others a traditional seven-period day.
- Funding for tutoring and after-school programs was described as insufficient, and some participants suggested that funds spent on consultants could instead support state-level lobbying for additional resources.

Areas of Consensus

- Preserve neighborhood schools and community cohesion and avoid long-distance busing across I-85.
- Provide clearer, more transparent, and validated data before finalizing any boundary or assignment decisions.

- Maintain and expand equitable access to specialized programs across all schools, rather than concentrating them in a subset of schools.
- Prioritize individualized, student-centered learning that meets students where they are academically.
- Rebuild trust between the district and the community by showing how community feedback informs final decisions.
- Improve academic outcomes, particularly in reading and math, as a shared priority alongside any structural changes.

Diverse Perspectives

- One group cited another district's experience to argue that larger elementary schools are not the right approach, while also expressing support for a 9th-grade campus concept.
- Participants were split on how well they understood the distinction between “special education” and “special services,” with opinions differing within the same group.
- Some participants emphasized redrawing attendance boundaries and revisiting waivers as the primary lever for change, while others emphasized funding, staffing, and program investment as necessary first steps.
- Views differed on whether inconsistent scheduling (block versus a traditional seven-period day) across high schools should be a priority for standardization.
- Some participants framed socioeconomic and program diversity as a core priority for any redistricting outcome, while others focused primarily on transportation and proximity concerns.

Questions Raised

- What specific problem is the district trying to solve with these proposed changes?
- What does “over capacity” actually mean for a school, and what are the implications for the next two years?
- Why is this process moving forward without a permanent superintendent or director of student assignment in place?
- What incentives would make families more comfortable with proposed boundaries or program moves?
- Can the district provide clearer, consistent definitions for terms used in the guiding principles, such as “transportation” and “proximity”?
- Could funds currently directed to consultants instead support lobbying the state for additional education funding?

Additional Observations

- Participants raised concerns about parking and overcrowding at school events as a secondary effect of high school overcrowding.
- One group pointed to a prior period when a DeKalb school under a different grade configuration was considered high-performing and suggested the district revisit that model.
- Concerns about rising property taxes and the long-term impact of class-size waivers were raised alongside calls for greater fiscal transparency.

- Participants asked to see documentation of how feedback from this and prior engagement sessions has been, or will be, used to inform the district's eventual proposal.