

Cross Keys Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #2

Executive Summary Report

Thursday, October 1, 2026 | 6:05 PM – 7:45 PM

Meeting Overview

The second DeKalb County School District (DCSD) Community Advisory Team session for the Cross Keys Cluster moved from open listening to direct review of specific student assignment options. The meeting was facilitated by the United Way, with KW Green Consulting serving as the scribe and documentation team responsible for accurately capturing and analyzing community input. The meeting reviewed group norms carried over from the first session, including listening to understand, sharing airtime, and focusing on what can be learned rather than reaching consensus.

District staff recapped the project timeline and shared that changes are expected to take effect in Fall 2027. More public meetings and online surveys will follow before DeKalb Board of Education takes action. Staff explained that elementary school options and middle and high school concepts are being presented separately on purpose. Participants were informed that the session was intended to gather input rather than select a final option. A third engagement session is expected to bring the pieces together into fuller options.

Three elementary options were presented. Option 1 is called Limited Impact. Option 2 is called Balance As Needed. Option 3 is called Balance All Schools. Two middle and high school concepts were also presented. Concept A would feed six middle schools into seven high schools, a split-feeder model. Concept B would keep a one-to-one feeder pattern, with seven middle schools each feeding one high school.

The session ran behind schedule. The video experienced audio problems and ran significantly over time, reducing the time available for small-group discussions and formal report-outs. The facilitator apologized for the delay. Meeting materials were provided in both English and Spanish, and an interpreter was present throughout for Spanish-speaking participants. Cluster maps were posted in the room and distributed.

Participation Summary

Eight small groups took part, ranging from about three to eight participants each. Two DeKalb Board of Education members were present. One reporter from Decaturish News was present.

Major Themes

Elementary Option 1 was largely rejected. Several groups raised concern about repeated instability for families in the Pleasantdale area, tied to earlier proposals moving Carey Reynolds

students there. Participants said this area has been "shoved around for years" and wants a stable neighborhood school instead of more movement.

Elementary Option 2 drew the most detailed discussion. It proposes a shared campus between Ashford Park and John Lewis, made up of roughly 86 percent current Ashford Park students and 14 percent current John Lewis students, split across two buildings, one serving kindergarten through second grade and the other serving third through fifth grade. Participants asked directly whether specialized services, including ESOL support, would follow the students moving into the new shared campus. Multiple groups raised concern about splitting siblings across buildings or bus routes, and about logistics such as parent-teacher conferences and pickup when a child at each building gets sick. At the same time, some participants saw real value in the option. They described it as the only proposal that blends Ashford Park and John Lewis, something they called the hardest barrier to break along the Buford Highway corridor and said they would rather open that door now than keep fighting to maintain two separate schools.

Elementary Option 3 drew more conditional support. Participants said it does the best job balancing enrollment, proximity, and capacity across schools generally, and several specifically wanted the district to prioritize giving the Oakcliff area a neighborhood school to build on. But groups also raised concern about Carey Reynolds families being split again, this time tied to Oakcliff. One group was candid that pushing full separation in a wealthier, more influential part of the cluster risks "wasting political capital," while also describing the option as a chance to finally break what one participant called a "political monster" the community has faced for years. Multiple groups also cautioned that Option 3's balance could be temporary, since other conflicts may resurface if underlying issues are not fully addressed.

On the middle and high school concepts, participants pushed back on Concept A's split-feeder structure. Several groups specifically asked why Henderson Middle School would feed into Cross Keys rather than Tucker, citing driving distance as a concern. Concept B drew more support for preserving one-to-one feeder relationships, but also raised new worries about a possible new, not-yet-designed middle school for the Cross Keys cluster, referred to informally as a "mystery" or "magical" middle school. Participants worried this could function like a magnet program that pulls students out of the Cross Keys cluster entirely and wanted assurance that students who fought for the cluster's ongoing school construction would be the ones to benefit from it.

Data transparency was one of the strongest and most emotional themes of the night. Multiple groups said they could not meaningfully evaluate any map or boundary line without demographic, funding, and resource data layered alongside it. Participants specifically wanted to know what happens to funding, including ESOL and special education resources, when a school's population shifts, and whether that funding reliably follows students. One participant's comment that the community's agency had been removed through a lack of communication notably drew applause from the room. Participants also raised safety concerns about mixing very different age groups in a single building, citing scenarios like a sixth grader near twelfth graders or a kindergartener sharing a building with eighth graders.

Key Concerns

- Repeated instability for Pleasantdale-area families under Option 1, building on earlier proposals to move Carey Reynolds students there.
- Whether ESOL and other specialized services would follow students moving into a shared Ashford Park and John Lewis campus under Option 2.
- Splitting siblings across buildings or bus routes, and everyday logistics like pickup and parent-teacher conferences, under a shared-campus model.
- Carey Reynolds families being split a second time under Option 3, this time tied to Oakcliff.
- Whether pursuing full separation in a wealthier, more influential part of the cluster would cost the process political support.
- Concept A's split-feeder structure, and specifically why Henderson Middle School would feed into Cross Keys rather than Tucker.
- A possible new, undesigned middle school for the Cross Keys cluster functioning like a magnet program that pulls students out of the cluster.
- Safety of mixing widely different age groups, such as sixth and twelfth graders, in a single building.
- Lack of demographic, funding, and resource data to evaluate any proposed map or boundary change.
- Whether funding, especially for ESOL and special education, reliably follows students when a school's population shifts.
- Sudden demographic shifts turning a currently majority group into a minority at a given school.
- Segregation, both along redrawn boundary lines and within a school's own classrooms or tracks.
- Proposals that do not include demographic numbers alongside the maps presented.

Areas of Consensus

Across groups, there was strong agreement that consistency matters most: stable feeder patterns, predictable transportation, and a consistent experience for students and families regardless of which school they end up in. Participants widely agreed that services, especially ESOL and special education support, need to follow students reliably, and that a patchwork of partial fixes is worse than a plan that addresses the underlying imbalance directly.

There was also broad agreement on the need for more transparent data before the next session, specifically demographic shifts, funding and resource allocation, and the relationship between enrollment numbers and budget. Safety when mixing different age groups in one building was raised as a serious concern across multiple groups. Equity and preventing further segregation, both between schools and within them, came up consistently as a top priority.

Diverse Perspectives

Views on Option 2 were genuinely split. Some participants focused on the logistical and safety concerns of a shared Ashford Park and John Lewis campus. Others saw it as a rare, valuable opportunity to finally break down a long-standing barrier between the two communities, even accepting that the practical issues around services and transportation would need to be worked out.

Reactions to Option 3 also varied. Most groups saw it as the most balanced option overall, but one group was candid that forcing full separation in a wealthier part of the cluster could cost political capital, while still describing it as worth pursuing to finally address a long-standing imbalance.

On Concept B, most participants supported its one-to-one feeder structure, but concerns were raised about grade-mixing safety and the risk of a future magnet-style middle school drawing students and resources away from Cross Keys. It was also noted that Sequoyah HS would likely be overlooked.

Questions Raised

- Will the district provide detailed maps cross-referenced with demographic, funding, and resource data before the next session?
- Do specialized services, including ESOL support, follow students who move into a new shared campus under Option 2?
- Why would Henderson Middle School feed into Cross Keys rather than Tucker under Concept A?
- What grade configuration would a new Cross Keys middle school use, and could it function as a magnet program that draws students out of the cluster?
- How will the district ensure funding, especially for ESOL and special education, follows students when a school's population shifts?
- How will transportation and sibling logistics work if elementary students are split across two buildings or two schools?
- Participants inquired who was the staff offering input instructional capacity. Who determines the percentage of students, teachers, etc.?
- How is the district gathering data on how kids get to school, i.e., walkers, car, bus?
- How many schools in each option would fall below state projected enrollment for funding?
- Participants reported disliking a 6-12 campus but would be okay with a 6-7 and 8-12 campus. Would all clusters have to have the same grade bandings?

Additional Observations

- One note mentioned that the Cross Keys cluster had been promised the new school and better facilities for years. Equity for everyone was emphasized.

- A participant inquired why current magnets were not a part of the conversation and suggested moving Kittredge to Dresden. There was another inquiry about accurate school capacity numbers and how it might affect enrollment perception.
- Preference for some was the one-to-one middle to high school feeder.
- There was consistent concern expressed about socio-economic segregation.