

Druid Hills Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #2

Executive Summary Report

Tuesday, September 29, 2026 | 6:01 PM – 7:40 PM

Meeting Overview

The second DeKalb County School District (DCSD) Community Advisory Team session for the Druid Hills Cluster was focused on direct review of three elementary school options and two middle and high school concepts. DCSD opened with a welcome and an overview of the Student Assignment Project's goal. That goal is a comprehensive, long-term, and transparent framework for future assignment and attendance decisions. Una Ali of United Way of Greater Atlanta facilitated, with two members of KW Green Consulting serving as the scribe/documentation team. The meeting was held at Druid Hills High School. The facilitator reviewed group norms. These included listening to understand, sharing airtime, challenging ideas rather than people, and thinking district-wide rather than school by school. Each group assigned a note-taker, a timekeeper, and a spokesperson.

Participants watched videos showing how construction could proceed for Fall 2027 and Fall 2029. This was followed by a review of how the three elementary options and two middle and high school concepts were structured. Groups were asked to evaluate each option against three questions. How well does it align with district policy? What stands out as positive? What raises concern? Audio quality was a problem throughout the video portion. The facilitator invited CAT team members to move closer toward the front of the room to hear better.

District and United Way staff circulated throughout to answer questions. After discussion, DCSD staff and members of the posted flip charts around the room for a gallery walk. Many charts carried asterisks and check marks to inform how many participants from other groups agreed with what was reported out.

Participation Summary

There were 43 participants in this meeting. There were 10 groups, but Group 3 was folded into another group after only two of its members showed up. Small group discussion was noticeably more engaged than at the first session.

Participants requested to receive the slides as a handout because they contain important text needed for the discussion. The sound was very difficult to hear, in some cases inaudible, so copies for everyone are requested. It was suggested that this session would've been more effective with break-out rooms. The challenges with understanding the videos were described as annoying.

One participant specifically asked that slide content be provided as a handout at the next session, since the slides contained text needed for discussion.

Major Themes

Long-term stability versus short-term disruption was the theme raised most often, by nearly every group. Participants did not want to redo this process again in three to five years. Several said repeated redistricting erodes community trust. Multiple groups asked directly how will the district know if a chosen option is actually working, and who will be consulted if projections turn out to be wrong. Splitting middle school feeder groups into different high schools was a major concern tied to student wellbeing. Several groups referenced a specific scenario where about five percent, and in one account as much as 85 percent, of a middle school cohort would be sent to a different high school than their peers. Participants connected this directly to concerns about socialization, sense of connection, and mental health.

Geographic proximity and traffic came up across almost every table. Participants wanted to know how far students would travel under each option. Several specifically flagged routes that would cross major expressways. These included Pleasantdale crossing two expressways under Option 1 and a proposed Woodward-to-Briar Vista route that would cross a highway. One group cited a specific school operating at around 113 to 115 percent capacity as a sign of how uneven current enrollment already is.

Data clarity and trust in the numbers was a recurring frustration. Multiple groups said the data presented was confusing or inconsistent. Some used the word mistrust directly when describing their reaction to the process. One table did supply specific enrollment figures tied to the three options. Option 1 was reported as affecting 1,619 students, or about 9.2 percent of enrollment and 7.9 percent of capacity. Option 2 was reported as affecting 1,970 students, or about 11.2 percent of enrollment and 9.6 percent of capacity. Option 3 was reported as affecting 3,414 students, or about 19.5 percent of enrollment and 16.7 percent of capacity. That same option would address growth at Avondale by moving students to McLendon, which has roughly 200 open seats.

Grade configuration concerns came up repeatedly in the middle and high school discussion. Housing grades 6 through 12 in one building was a particular worry, alongside specific concern about eighth graders sharing campuses and sports programs with much older high schoolers. At the same time, many groups said they liked a one-to-one feeder pattern. That means a single middle school feeding into a single high school without a split. Most saw Concept B as generally better on that point than Concept A. Specialty and magnet programs were flagged as a gap in the materials. One group noted that magnet and theme schools, referencing Globe, DAA, and the Museum School by name, were not accounted for in either middle and high school concept. Building reuse also came up as an open question. Participants asked how a converted elementary school would be funded and what the actual building plan would be.

Key Concerns

- Splitting middle school cohorts between different high schools, with impacts described on socialization and mental health.
- Whether any option provides a long-term fix or will simply require another redistricting process within three to five years.
- Confusing or inconsistent enrollment and capacity data, described by some groups as outright mistrust of the process.

- Proximity and traffic, including routes that cross expressways, such as Pleasantdale under Option 1 and Woodward to Briar Vista under Option 3.
- Whether special education and other specialized programs are factored into utilization and capacity figures.
- Magnet and theme school programs, including Globe, DAA, and the Museum School, are not accounted for in either middle or high school concepts.
- Housing grades 6 through 12 in a single building, and eighth graders sharing campuses and sports with older high schoolers.
- Funding and planning for converting an elementary school building if one is repurposed.
- Under enrollment left unresolved at specific schools, including McLendon and Smoke Rise, even under options that address overcrowding elsewhere.
- Whether 100 percent capacity as a planning target limits the district's future ability to lower class sizes or improve teacher-to-student ratios. One note indicated that Fernbank had 918 students and that it could not handle 930 students (“FB” on sticky note assumed to be Fernbank).
- Why Pleasantdale would be changed at all under some options when it is currently under capacity.

Areas of Consensus

Nearly every group raised the same central tension. They wanted to balance enrollment now against the risk of disrupting established communities and relationships. There was broad agreement that whatever option moves forward should be built to last, not revisited again in a few years. Proximity and traffic were treated as serious, practical concerns at almost every table, not a secondary issue.

On the middle and high school concepts, a one-to-one feeder pattern consistently the most preferred option across groups. That means no split between a middle school and its high school. Several specifically said Concept B's better support for the west side of the district and the Cross Keys area was a point in its favor. There was also shared concern about mixing middle and high school grade levels on one campus, even among groups that otherwise supported a 6-12 configuration for cost or transportation reasons.

Diverse Perspectives

Reactions to Option 3 split sharply. Several groups called it a poison pill that could drive families out of the district entirely, citing the scale of movement and disruption involved. Other groups took a more measured view. They acknowledged the option causes more short-term disruption but could be the most fixable long-term option, particularly if the district provided clearer numbers and information to support it. One group explicitly said Option 3 was their preferred choice because it did the best job equalizing class sizes and ratios across schools.

Preferences on Concept A versus Concept B also varied. Most groups favored Concept B for preserving a one-to-one feeder relationship. But one group called Concept A the best option overall because it balances student ratios well, even while acknowledging the social impact of splitting some students. Another group pointed out that Concept B's instructional capacity only covers three grade levels, which they saw as insufficient, even though they also liked its lower transportation cost and reduced traffic (fewer buses and families riding together).

One group proposed something no other table raised. They suggested a compromise option between Option 2 and Option 3, described informally as a "2.5," meeting in the middle of the two. A different participant raised a concern that was also not echoed elsewhere. She was concerned about one cluster's community making decisions that affect another cluster without having enough knowledge of that community's specific circumstances.

Questions Raised

- How will the district know if the chosen option is actually working, and who will be consulted if projections prove wrong?
- Why is this specific redistricting approach being implemented now?
- Are special education and other specialized programs factored into capacity and utilization figures?
- Why would Pleasantdale be changed under some options when it is currently under capacity?
- How will a converted elementary school building be funded, and what is the actual building plan?
- Why does Concept A leave high school seats unfilled, and why would Sequoyah High School specifically be left unfilled if that is the outcome of splitting groups?
- How are magnet and theme school programs, such as Globe, DAA, and the Museum School, accounted for under either concept?
- Is the district's target a 100 percent capacity goal, and if so, does that limit future ability to reduce class sizes or improve staffing ratios?
- Who can participants contact with questions, and how will they stay informed as the process continues?
- What is the proposal for Robert Shaw Theme School? Participants did not see it listed in any of the three scenarios.
- Are there any other elementary programs that will be gone with any of the 3 options?

Additional Observations

- Some participants began leaving around 7:34 PM, slightly ahead of the facilitator's formal closure.