

Lakeside Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #2

Executive Summary Report

Tuesday, September 29, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:45 PM

Meeting Overview

The second DeKalb County School District (DCSD) Community Advisory Team session for the Lakeside cluster moved from open listening to direct review of student assignment options. A representative from the DeKalb County School District opened the meeting and turned it over to the facilitator. The meeting was facilitated by United Way and two scribes from KW Green Consulting, LLC documented the session. The session began with an overview video on how the concepts are grouped and guided the discussion that followed. The video covered enrollment trends and possibility of sharing a campus, protecting school communities, and weighing new magnet programs against overcrowding or making no changes at all.

The recap video had audio playback problems and had to be paused for correction. The full video segment ran 15 to 20 minutes longer than planned. Group discussion was full time as planned for eight minutes per Option/Concept. Because of time constraints, participants were allowed to stay behind to complete the gallery walk activity if they chose. Groups were held to an eight-minute discussion limit per topic and a two-minute report-out per group followed. The Gallery Walk consisted of groups walking around and reading notes from other tables. Most participants stayed to complete the gallery walk by placing stickers next to feedback they felt needed to be elevated.

Participation Summary

There were 55 participants, which was noticeably larger turnout than the prior session. They were divided into ten groups, ranging from three to eight participants each.

Participants opened the session by reaffirming themes from the first Lakeside meeting. These themes included school capacity, overcrowding, feeder patterns, community disruption, specialty programs, and the need for long-term planning. A recurring point from the recap from session one was that elementary rezoning should not be considered separately from middle and high school planning. Any elementary boundary change ultimately affects a student's full K-12 path.

Major Themes

The dominant theme across nearly every table was a call for holistic K-12 planning. Participants did not want elementary, middle, and high school changes evaluated separately. They worried that changes made now without accounting for long-term feeder patterns could require another round of rezoning within just a few years. Several groups said plainly that a plan without future enrollment projections would mean the district is "back in five years to do it again."

Elementary Option 1 was seen by multiple groups as causing the least disruption. It also kept some communities together. But several tables raised a specific concern. Moving Cary Reynolds students to Pleasantdale could push Pleasantdale over capacity. One group cited a potential enrollment increase of around 1,000 students. Other groups said Option 1 does not adequately address existing overcrowding at Livsey Elementary. The same was said of the Chesnut, Huntley Hills, and Hightower area. Participants sometimes called this a persistent overcrowding "triangle" that neither Option 1 nor Option 2 resolves. Transportation distance for Cary Reynolds families was also raised.

Elementary Option 2 was viewed more favorably by several groups. It was seen as causing less disruption while addressing some utilization concerns. It also generally kept communities together. Participants asked for clarity on the relationship between Ashford Park and John Lewis Elementary. They said that if two campuses are used, students should remain part of one school community. They should not be split into separate attendance zones. Some groups still felt Option 2 does not fully resolve attendance and overcrowding issues on its own.

Elementary Option 3 drew the strongest and most consistent pushback. Participants across many tables called it too disruptive. They said it moved too many students and neighborhoods for limited benefit. Several groups used strong language. They called it "chaos," "insane," "a joke," or something that "destroys everything." One specific concern was the French and Dual Language Immersion program tied to Evansdale. Some participants worried it could be lost or shifted out to Tucker. Another concern was the effect on travel time for Doraville United students. Some participants acknowledged Option 3 might produce more balanced utilization numbers but they questioned whether that balance was worth the disruption required. They also asked whether it would hold up if enrollment shifted again.

Several groups proposed an unofficial "Option 4." This was not one of the three presented by the district. They described it as a more holistic, district-wide approach. It would combine the stronger elements of the existing options. It would invest in schools throughout the county rather than relying on isolated micro-adjustments. One group specifically wanted this option to directly address the persistent Chesnut, Huntley Hills, and Hightower overcrowding issue. That issue was left unresolved by Options 1 and 2.

Capacity and enrollment data were questioned repeatedly and specifically. Participants said published capacity figures may not reflect actual usable space. This is especially true once specialty programs, classroom use, and building conditions are accounted for. Henderson Middle School came up by name. Participants questioned whether its published capacity reflects real usable capacity. They also expressed concern about splitting Henderson students under some feeder scenarios. Oakcliff Theme School also came up. Participants asked about its capacity. They raised concern about assigning neighborhood students into a theme school's attendance requirements without those families having chosen that program voluntarily.

For middle and high school, concern centered on split feeder patterns. Participants explained that middle schoolers often build academic, athletic, arts, and social ties to a future high school well before finishing eighth grade. Splitting middle school students between different high schools could disrupt those relationships. There was comparatively more interest in Concept B and a direct-feeder approach. Participants were especially interested in the idea of creating new middle school capacity specifically for the Cross Keys cluster. But they wanted significantly more detail on funding, construction or conversion timelines, and enrollment projections before judging whether it would work. Some participants also

raised concern about combining middle-school-aged students with much older high schoolers on a shared campus.

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.
- Elementary Option 1 moving Cary Reynolds students into Pleasantdale, risking a significant overcrowding increase there.
- Options 1 and 2 both leaving the Chesnut, Huntley Hills, and Hightower overcrowding "triangle" unresolved.
- Elementary Option 3's scale of disruption, widely seen as too large relative to its benefit.
- Potential loss or relocation of the French and Dual Language Immersion program tied to Evansdale under Option 3.
- Whether Henderson Middle School's published capacity reflects actual usable space, and concern about splitting its students.
- Fairness of assigning neighborhood students into Oakcliff Theme School's attendance requirements without a voluntary choice.
- Split feeder patterns disrupting academic, athletic, arts, and social relationships built before high school.
- Lack of detail on funding, timeline, and enrollment projections for a potential new Cross Keys middle school under Concept B.
- Combining middle-school-aged students with older high schoolers on one shared campus.
- Risk that any option chosen without long-term projections will require another rezoning process within a few years.
- Whether Option 3's changes could affect funding, including concern about driving families toward private schools.
- General skepticism about whether published capacity and enrollment figures are accurate and complete.

Areas of Consensus

Across nearly all 10 groups, there was strong agreement on one point – elementary rezoning cannot be planned in isolation from middle and high school feeder decisions. There was also broad, consistent opposition to Option 3. Most groups described it as too disruptive relative to any benefit it offers. Option 2 was the most positively received of the three official options across multiple tables. Still, it was not universally seen as sufficient on its own.

Participants widely agreed that the district needs to provide clearer, more transparent capacity, enrollment, and matriculation data. They said this is needed before the community can give fully informed feedback. There was also shared concern about split feeder patterns in general. Participants shared an interest in a longer-term, more holistic solution. They did not want incremental changes likely to require revisiting within a few years.

Diverse Perspectives

Views on Concept B and the proposed Cross Keys middle school were not unanimous. Several groups actively wanted Cross Keys included in a direct-feeder plan. They saw new middle school capacity there as a real opportunity. At least one group took the opposite position. That group stated Cross Keys should not be included in the Concept B plan at all.

Table-level reactions to the elementary options also varied in degree, even when the overall direction agreed. Some groups called Option 1 a reasonable, minimum-impact starting point. Others felt it offers no future projections and simply delays a bigger problem. Most groups were critical of Option 3. But a few acknowledged it produces more balanced utilization numbers. They said the real question is whether that balance is worth the disruption, rather than rejecting the option outright.

One group asked whether more than three elementary options could be developed. That same group raised a separate question about preserving lottery-based access to specialty programs under any new boundaries.

Questions Raised

- Can the district provide more than three elementary options? How would lottery-based program access be preserved under any new boundaries?
- What is the actual usable capacity at schools like Henderson Middle School, once specialty programs and building conditions are factored in?
- What is the capacity of Oakcliff Theme School? How would attendance requirements affect families assigned there without choosing it?
- What is the relationship between Ashford Park and John Lewis Elementary under Option 2? Would students remain part of one school community?
- What is the funding, timeline, and enrollment projections for a potential new Cross Keys middle school under Concept B?
- How would split feeder patterns affect students moving from Dual Language Immersion programs into high school-level coursework?
- What does "balance" actually mean under Option 3? Could it affect school funding or drive families toward private schools?
- Are accommodations and specialty programs factored into capacity and feeder-pattern planning across all three options?
- How will the transition from middle school to high school be planned under Option 1? That detail is currently missing.
- What is the realistic timeline and process if the district needs to revisit rezoning again in a few years?

Additional Observations
