

Dunwoody Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #2

Executive Summary Report

Thursday, October 1, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:35 PM

Meeting Overview

The second DeKalb County School District (DCSD) Community Advisory Team session for the Dunwoody Cluster moved from open listening to direct review of specific student assignment options. It was held at Dunwoody High School. A County representative opened the meeting with prepared remarks. The framework under Board Policy AD was reviewed and participants were reminded that tonight's purpose was feedback, not a vote or a final choice. The session was facilitated by United Way, with KW Green Consulting serving as the scribe and documentation team. Participants arrived steadily after 6:00 PM, which pushed the start back. The facilitator stated time would be made up later in the agenda.

The group reviewed norms carried over from the first session. These included listening to understand, sharing airtime, challenging ideas rather than people, and thinking district-wide rather than school by school. Each table named a facilitator, a recorder, and a reporter. Participants used sticky notes for key points, flip charts for larger themes, and index cards as a parking lot for questions.

Three elementary options were presented by video. Option 1 is Limited Impact. Option 2 is Balance As Needed. Option 3 is Balance All Schools. Two middle and high school concepts were also presented. Concept 1, also called Concept A, uses split feeders, with the cluster's six middle schools feeding into seven high schools once Sequoyah High School opens. Concept 2, also called Concept B, tries to preserve a one-to-one middle to high school feeder pattern, which would require converting or repurposing an additional school. Staff were explicit that the elementary options and the middle and high school concepts were presented separately on purpose, and that a third session will combine them into fuller options.

Groups were given eight minutes per option or concept to discuss strengths, concerns, and questions, following three guiding questions on each table. Facilitators had to repeatedly clarify the timing, and one scribe noted that groups initially focused only on Elementary Option 1 before an extra three minutes was added to cover the remaining options. Video audio was described as harder to hear than at other sessions. An interpreter supporting Spanish-speaking participants asked the presenter to slow down. A countdown alarm used to manage time was compared to a fire drill alarm and was later adjusted after participants found it too startling. The session closed with a brief, lightly attended gallery walk, since most participants had already shared their feedback during report-outs.

Participation Summary

Approximately 50 participants were divided into nine small groups, including school administrators, students, and teachers. Group 9 was consolidated into other tables after too few members arrived, leaving Groups 1 through 8 and Group 10. Many of the participants watched the videos in advance of the meeting and were very engaged in reviewing the options. They participated in the gallery walk of group feedback as they exited the room.

Major Themes

Across almost every group, participants said none of the three elementary options fully solved Dunwoody's existing capacity problems. Several groups liked pieces of different options rather than one option. Multiple groups favored the configuration south of I-85 in Option 1 and the cleaner boundaries created north of I-85 in Option 2. Option 3 was widely seen as the most disruptive, moving the most students and crossing the most communities, though a few groups also saw it as the option that best balances enrollment across schools long term.

The dual-campus model proposed for some elementary schools drew consistent skepticism. Participants questioned whether splitting one attendance area across two buildings would be efficient, especially for transportation, siblings, and family logistics such as pickup and conferences. One group stated directly that they did not want Dunwoody treated as one attendance zone split across two buildings.

Underused newer facilities came up repeatedly. Participants wanted the district to fill newer buildings, such as Dunwoody and Austin Elementary, before continuing to fill older ones. Several groups said none of the elementary options optimize enrollment at the newest facilities, and that relying on older, smaller schools is not a sustainable long-term strategy.

On the middle and high school concepts, views on split feeders were genuinely divided, discussed further under Diverse Perspectives below. Nearly every group that discussed grade configuration opposed placing sixth graders in the same building as twelfth graders. Several groups asked whether an elementary school could instead be converted into a middle school, so that a one-to-one feeder pattern could be preserved, and wanted to understand the financial implications of doing so.

Participants repeatedly said they could not fully evaluate the middle and high school concepts without seeing how elementary schools feed into middle schools, which several groups believed could have a bigger effect on Dunwoody's overcrowding than the high school feeder pattern itself. Long-term vision and walkability were also raised. One group said the city of Dunwoody's walkability and bikeability goals were not reflected in how some proposed lines were drawn, and that boundary lines should be more thoughtfully tied to geography and community connections rather than enrollment numbers alone.

Data transparency and accountability ran through nearly every report-out. Participants wanted clarity on projected financial savings, reported during the session as roughly 150 to 200 million dollars, or about 7 to 10 percent of the district's total budget, and asked how those savings would

be spent or reinvested in facilities and resources. Participants also asked why none of the options include measures of student achievement or educational outcomes, and how the district would ultimately judge whether the Student Assignment Project succeeded.

Key Concerns

- None of the three elementary options was seen as fully resolving Dunwoody's current capacity and overcrowding challenges.
- Whether a dual-campus elementary model is efficient and economical, particularly for transportation, siblings, and family logistics.
- A direct conflict between two groups over how Pleasantdale's capacity changes under Option 1, described further under Diverse Perspectives.
- Underused newer buildings, such as Dunwoody and Austin Elementary, while older buildings continue to be filled first.
- Placing sixth graders and twelfth graders in the same building under a 6-12 configuration.
- Whether an elementary school could be converted into a middle school, and what that would cost.
- Evaluating middle and high school concepts without seeing the elementary-to-middle school feeder patterns.
- Whether proposed boundary lines reflect Dunwoody's walkability and bikeability goals or create longer commutes than necessary.
- Whether schools receiving students under any option will have the staff, programs, and resources those students need, citing Hightower as a current example of an under-resourced, high-need school.
- Lack of clarity on projected financial savings and how those savings would be reinvested in facilities and identified needs.
- Absence of any stated measure of student achievement or educational outcomes in the options presented.
- Whether feedback that is unfavorable to an option will lead to a new option in the third session, or whether current options will simply move forward.
- Discomfort among some participants about evaluating options for communities and neighborhoods they do not know well.

Areas of Consensus

There was broad agreement that Elementary Option 3 causes the most disruption, even among groups that also saw some long-term value in it. There was similarly broad agreement that newer, under-enrolled buildings should be filled before older ones, and that none of the three elementary options make full use of the district's newest facilities.

Nearly every group that addressed grade configuration agreed that housing sixth graders with twelfth graders is not acceptable. There was also wide agreement that the middle and high school

concepts are hard to judge without first seeing the elementary-to-middle feeder patterns, and that any option should come with clearer data on enrollment, costs, and projected savings. Multiple groups independently raised the idea of converting an elementary school into a middle school to preserve one-to-one feeder relationships, and several specifically asked for the resulting financial implications before deciding.

Diverse Perspectives

Participants described Pleasantdale's capacity under Option 1 in opposite directions. Some stated that Pleasantdale would be significantly under capacity while other schools remain over capacity. Others stated that Pleasantdale would become significantly over capacity while other schools remain under capacity.

Views on split feeders for the middle and high school concepts were clearly divided. Some groups were open to split feeders. They pointed to the added flexibility if enrollment shifts and noted that other districts use split feeders successfully. Other groups opposed split feeders strongly, saying they break up student relationships and communities without solving overcrowding.

Reactions to Elementary Option 3 also varied in degree even where groups agreed it was the most disruptive. Some groups focused mainly on the disruption to communities such as Kingsley, Chesnut, and Hightower. Others acknowledged that same disruption while still seeing Option 3 as the option that most fairly balances enrollment and addresses equity across the cluster long term, if paired with real resource commitments for receiving schools.

Questions Raised

- Why does none of the three elementary options address the significant under capacity already present in the Dunwoody cluster?
- Would specialized services and resources reliably follow students who are reassigned under any option?
- Could an elementary school be converted into a middle school, and what would that cost?
- Where will the Sequoyah High School attendance boundary be drawn, and how will that affect the rest of the northern part of the district?
- If feedback on one of the presented option is unfavorable, will a new option be developed and presented in the third session?
- How much will the Student Assignment Project actually save, and how will those savings be spent or reinvested?
- Why do none of the proposed options include measures of student success or educational outcomes, and how will the district know if the project worked?
- What would transition plans mean for teachers, and would teachers move with groups of reassigned students?

- Can an elementary school building actually host older students, such as eighth graders, if it is repurposed as a middle school?
- Participants asked why boundaries were being discussed before programs? Why was school choice opening before these decisions were being made? Why would school choice still be needed? How will we know if SAP is successful?

Additional Observations

- Some participants said they were not aware the session would address district-wide options and expected the discussion to stay focused on Dunwoody specifically.
- Some participants felt that none of the options solved the Dunwoody cluster as a whole or addressed underutilized buildings.

The following were highlighted during the gallery walk as participants were exiting:

- One group noted Option 3 moves high income families to Vanderlyn and decreases the financial support to Kingsley.
- Some noted difficulty discussing elementary and middle and high schools separately as they were connected.