Public Comment Session
Engagement Session 3
Druid Hills MS location
11/4/26

Executive Summary
The district should adopt a thoughtful, long-term strategy that prioritizes educational quality, leadership, community stability, and public trust rather than rushing toward a boundary solution.

While speakers varied in their specific concerns, there was broad alignment around four ideas:

- Plan for the long term, not just current capacity issues.
- Invest in high-quality schools and leadership, not just buildings.
- Ensure enrollment and capacity data are accurate before major decisions are made.
- Minimize unnecessary disruption to students, families, and communities.

Primary Themes
1. Long-Term Vision Over Short-Term Solutions
Several speakers challenged the district to articulate a broader vision for public education rather than focusing narrowly on attendance boundaries and capacity utilization.

Common questions included:

- What is the end goal?
- What kind of school system is DeKalb trying to build?
- How does this plan improve educational outcomes?
- Will these changes solve problems permanently or simply create another round of reassignment later?

The conversation consistently returned to the idea that boundary changes should support a larger educational strategy.

2. School Leadership Drives School Success
One of the strongest themes was that school quality is driven by leadership, culture, and community buy-in rather than attendance zones alone.
Speakers stressed:

- Strong principals matter.
- Consistent academic expectations matter.
- Teacher quality and retention matter.
- Parent engagement matters.
- School culture cannot simply be transferred by moving students.

Several comments suggested that discussions about buildings and enrollment have overshadowed conversations about what actually makes schools successful.

3. Deliberate Pace and Careful Planning
A recurring message was the desire for a slower, more deliberate planning process.
Speakers raised concerns about:

- Implementation timelines.
- Staffing implications.
- Budget planning.
- Transportation logistics.
- Community understanding of the proposals.

The underlying sentiment was that taking additional time to get the plan right would be preferable to implementing a solution that may require revision shortly afterward.

4. Confidence in the Data
Several comments focused on whether enrollment projections and capacity calculations are sufficiently accurate to support major decisions.
Concerns included:

- Student-generation projections.
- Classroom utilization assumptions.
- Boundary shift impacts.
- Future overcrowding risks.

Speakers expressed concern that if the assumptions are flawed, the district may soon face another round of reassignment discussions.

5. Community Stability and Predictability
Many comments reflected the importance of stability for families and neighborhoods.
Participants noted that:

- Families make long-term decisions based on school assignments.
- Home purchases are often linked to school attendance patterns.
- Frequent reassignment discussions create uncertainty.
- Trust is strengthened when plans remain consistent over time.

6. Cross Keys Middle School Planning
There was clear support for creating a dedicated middle school for the Cross Keys cluster, but speakers focused heavily on implementation details.
Major considerations included:

- Site selection.
- Transportation times.
- Highway crossings.
- Feeder alignment.
- Long-term facility planning.

Rather than opposing the concept itself, speakers were focused on ensuring it is executed thoughtfully.

Common Threads Across Speakers
Although each speaker approached the issue differently, several themes appeared repeatedly:

- **Strategic planning**
  Speakers consistently encouraged the district to think five, ten, and even twenty years ahead rather than focusing solely on immediate enrollment pressures.
- **Trust through transparency**
  Participants generally appreciated increased engagement and responsiveness but wanted continued transparency regarding assumptions, timelines, and decision-making criteria.
- **Educational quality**
  Speakers repeatedly shifted the conversation from boundaries and facilities back to educational outcomes, leadership, and student experience.
- **Stability**
  The desire for predictability emerged frequently, particularly regarding staffing, school assignments, neighborhood cohesion, and long-term planning.

Speaker Highlights
Esther Sumner
Key focus: Comprehensive long-range planning.
Highlights:

- Thanked the district for responding to requests around a Cross Keys middle school.
- Proposed a phased "Option E" approach.
- Advocated for expanding Ashford Park.
- Suggested a multi-year implementation timeline tied to future facility investments.
- Warned that insufficient investment could erode public confidence in DeKalb schools.

Margaret Wright Boylan
Key focus: Leadership and school culture.
Highlights:

- Argued that successful schools are created by leadership and culture, not simply boundaries.
- Used Kittredge as an example of a successful school community.
- Raised questions about maintaining community cohesion under a dual-campus model.
- Called for stronger attention to principal effectiveness and school culture.

Emily Weigel
Key focus: Implementation realities.
Highlights:

- Encouraged a slower and more intentional process.

- Highlighted impacts on staffing, recruitment, budgeting, transportation, and operations.
- Framed stability as a critical need for both educators and families.

Elizabeth Miller

Key focus: Transportation and accessibility.

Highlights:

- Examined practical travel implications for students.
- Raised concerns regarding highway crossings and commute times.
- Discussed location options for a future Cross Keys Middle School.
- Requested stronger accountability measures related to leadership decisions.

Jacob Hawkins

Key focus: Community investment and process.

Highlights:

- Thanked district leadership for engagement efforts.
- Emphasized that school decisions affect entire communities, not just students.
- Encouraged thoughtful planning and avoidance of short-term decision making.
- Advocated for protecting investments families have made in DeKalb communities.

Louis Fania

Key focus: Data integrity and public confidence.

Highlights:

- Acknowledged improvements in the district's engagement process.
- Questioned assumptions behind enrollment and capacity calculations.
- Raised concerns about specific proposed boundary adjustments.
- Called for an inspiring district-wide vision that would attract and retain families in public schools.