Druid Hills Cluster

DeKalb County School District Community Advisory Team (CAT)

Engagement Series #3

Executive Summary Report

Tuesday, November 10, 2026 | 6:00 PM – 7:30PM

Meeting Overview

This third and final CAT session for the Druid Hills cluster moved from presenting separate elementary options and middle and high school concepts to four complete, combined options, labeled Option A through Option D. The meeting was held at Druid Hills High School. The facilitator from the United Way opened the meeting with a welcome from DeKalb County School District and a reminder that the district is working toward a comprehensive, transparent, and long-term framework for student assignment decisions. Three videos covered the options this round, one for Option A, one covering Options B, C, and D together, and one covering special programs.

Before the small groups convened, participants pressed district staff with pointed questions. These included 1) what a dual campus means, 2) why Nancy Creek is being treated as a temporary swing space rather than a permanent solution, and 3) what happens to Cary Reynolds students when that school closes in 2029. Participants also asked how capital costs are funded, whether schools compete for the same money, and how the options fit into the district's existing budget. District staff did not answer the budget questions directly. One member said the group was being asked to evaluate how well each option would work because this member felt like there was no real plan behind the options at all.

Participant turnout was lower than at the first two Druid Hills sessions, so the facilitator combined smaller tables rather than letting groups run under four people each. Each group had about seven minutes per option, reporting one positive and one concern per option, with any remaining concerns sent to the parking lot. A gallery walk followed report-outs, with groups posting their chart paper by option along the room and providing their feedback. The facilitator closed by confirming there will be no fourth CAT session. The next opportunity for input is public comment on December 14 and 15, after which all engagement channels will be synthesized into a recommendation for the Board.

Participation Summary

Two scribes from KW Green Consulting documented the session with 21 attendees, a notably smaller turnout than the first two sessions.

Due to the lower attendance, groups were consolidated to ensure that each table had at least four participants. Groups 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 presented their reports. Although microphones were unavailable, the video and audio quality were clearer than in the previous session.

Major Themes

Option A was widely seen as the least expensive and least disruptive to elementary boundaries, and a few groups credited it with keeping students closer to their neighborhood schools. But it drew the strongest equity objections of any option. Multiple groups said splitting a single middle school student across several different high schools, generally described as falling along racial and socioeconomic lines, is not fair to students who were brought together in middle school. Participants also said Option A leavesdoss

Keys significantly under capacity and does not solve overcrowding anywhere else. One group said it creates over-enrollment in other areas instead of relieving it.

Option B was valued for its one-to-one feeder pattern and for the possibility of better utilizing magnet programming. One group suggested a hybrid approach that would move the magnet's middle school component to Henderson while keeping its high school component at Chamblee. Cost was the dominant objection, with a converted Woodward Elementary cited in the 60-to-100-million-dollar range.

Participants also raised concern about several elementary schools crossing I-85 or I-285 under this option, about schools already near or at 100 percent capacity, and about moving families into schools. They specifically named Briar Vista Elementary and Fernbank, stating they may not have adequate facilities or aftercare capacity for them.

Option C drew support for its one-to-one feeder pattern, its lower estimated cost of 10 to 15 million dollars to convert John Lewis Elementary into a middle school, and its goal of feeding more schools into Cross Keys to balance socioeconomics across the district. Groups kept returning to Cross Keys then sitting at 100 percent capacity. Participants also raised concerns about a significant loss of elementary seats under this option and overcrowding at Sequoyah and Tucker Middle Schools. There was renewed concern about Briar Vista students crossing interstates, which multiple groups said the district's own materials do not treat as a negative the way they do for other communities.

Option D was generally described as cost effective, in the same 10-to-15-million-dollar range as Option C. It was also described as achieving the best overall balance among the four options while converting the newest available building into a middle school. Participants liked the fact that it kept magnet programs in place and required comparatively less overall movement. The clearest concern was geography. Dresden would sit farther from Cross Keys High School than other options and moving through major roads such as Briar Vista or Brockett was flagged as a proximity problem under the district's own policy criteria.

Across nearly every table, two concerns cut across all four options. The first was transportation, with I-85, I-285, and other major roads described as dividing lines that any option would have to cross. One group pointed out that a mega elementary school it attends already has the same number of administrators and counselors as a school half its size, raising doubt about whether any newly combined school would be properly staffed. The second concern was trust in the SAP process itself. One group noted that the maps presented this round still showed changes the community had already rejected at the first session, with no explanation offered for why, and called this a clear example of the district's lack of transparency. Another group pushed back on being asked to evaluate four separate letter options at all, saying the pieces need to be judged as one connected system rather than in isolation.

Key Concerns

- Option A's split feeder pattern, which multiple groups described as falling along racial and socioeconomic lines and therefore inequitable.
- Cross Keys sitting significantly under capacity under Option A, and at 100 percent capacity under Option C.
- The cost of Option B, cited in the 60-to-100-million-dollar range to convert Woodward Elementary into a middle school.
- Moving families into schools, specifically Briar Vista Elementary and Fernbank, that may lack adequate facilities or aftercare capacity.

- A significant loss of elementary seats under Option C, raises questions about why seats are being removed if the district also says there are too many open seats elsewhere.
- Briar Vista students crossing interstates under Options C and D, which the district's own materials do not flag as a negative the way they do for other communities.
- Why Cary Reynolds, Hightower, and Pleasantdale students crossing highways under other options receive no similar attention.
- Whether Nancy Creek should remain a temporary swing space rather than becoming a permanent solution, and what happens to displaced students either way.
- Lack of clarity on how capital costs are funded, whether schools compete for the same money, and how any option fits the district's existing budget.
- Whether combined or mega elementary schools will receive adequate administrative, counseling, and special education staffing.
- Maps presented this round still reflect changes the community already rejected at the first session, with no explanation given.
- Whether moving the magnet program, under Option A or Option B, is fair without more information about current enrollment and where students live.
- Inconsistent treatment of Oakcliff Theme school which appears in Option A but is not addressed in Options B, C, or D.

Areas of Consensus

Across nearly every group, there was shared frustration that no single option solves overcrowding and capacity imbalance cleanly. Doubt was shared about whether the district's cost and utilization figures can be trusted without more detail. Transportation and major roads, especially I-85 and I-285, were treated as a serious, practical obstacle under every option rather than a secondary concern.

There was broad appreciation across Options B, C, and D for a one-to-one middle-to-high-school feeder pattern, described repeatedly as the clearest shared benefit of moving away from Option A. Participants also agreed that the district owes the community a clearer explanation of its budget and funding plan, and of why materials still include boundary changes the community already pushed back on earlier in the process.

Diverse Perspectives

Groups differed on whether Option C or Option D is the better of the two more cost-effective options. Some favored Option C for its stronger socioeconomic balance through Cross Keys. They also acknowledged it would leave Cross Keys at full capacity and remove many elementary seats. Others preferred Option D for its lower overall movement and for keeping magnet programs in place. In this instance, they acknowledged Dresden's greater distance from Cross Keys High School.

Participants also differed on how to approach the evaluation itself. Most groups worked through each option in turn, weighing their own positives and concerns. At least one group pushed back on that approach entirely. They felt that looking at the options as four separate letters misses the bigger picture, since the pieces are meant to work together as one system rather than be judged piece by piece.

Questions Raised

- What does a dual campus mean in practice, and why is Nancy Creek being used as a temporary swing space rather than a permanent solution?
- Where will Cary Reynolds students be accounted for in the attendance area once that school closes in 2029?
- How do capital improvement costs factor into funding already committed to other schools, and do schools compete for the same money?
- What is the district's budget for this process, and how does each option fit in with it?
- Why do the district's materials treat Briar Vista students crossing an interstate as a negative, but not Cary Reynolds, Hightower, or Pleasantdale students doing the same under other options?
- Why was a theme school included in Option A but left out of Options B, C, and D?
- Why do maps presented in this round still include changes the community rejected at the first session, with no explanation given?
- Is moving the magnet program under Option A or Option B fair, given limited visibility into current enrollment and where students live?
- How will combined or mega elementary schools be staffed with administrators, counselors, and special education support relative to their size?
- If an option fails or proves too costly, how does that cost compare to the cost of simply leaving underutilized schools as they are?

Additional Observations

- The facilitator announced there will be no fourth CAT session. The next opportunity for public input is public comment on December 14 and 15, after which all engagement channels will be synthesized into a Board recommendation.
- One group noted that a local ESPLOST had already passed, making some level of capital investment feasible even if not at the highest cost estimates discussed.