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FCPS Boundary Review

Policy 8130 Priority: **Proximity**

Promote contiguous attendance zones and maintain neighborhood groupings (to include condominium and apartment complexes) to eliminate and/or prevent establishment of attendance islands

In-Person Community Sessions Input: Summary

Discussions on school boundary adjustments frequently highlighted the importance of maintaining neighborhood groupings, eliminating attendance islands, and ensuring safe, walkable access to schools. These considerations not only foster stronger community ties but also reduce the logistical and emotional burdens associated with long commutes. Furthermore, proximity is closely tied to equitable access to educational resources, as families with nearby schools are better positioned to participate in programs and activities. This analysis explores the key themes from these discussions related to proximity: (1) neighborhood schools and community cohesion, (2) eliminating attendance islands, (3) walkability and safe access, (4) equitable access to resources, and (5) reducing commute times. This analysis examines the importance of proximity in creating a more inclusive, efficient, and supportive school system.

Themes Related to Proximity

1. Neighborhood Schools and Community Cohesion

Community members consistently expressed the desire to maintain neighborhood schools to strengthen local community connections and reduce the burden of long commutes. The importance of keeping students within close proximity to their homes was emphasized, with the goal of fostering a sense of belonging and continuity within neighborhoods. This includes ensuring that apartment complexes and condominiums are integrated into contiguous attendance zones.

Why important: Neighborhood schools promote stronger community ties, reduce transportation challenges, and improve student engagement by keeping them closer to home.

Supporting Quotes:

- "Keeping kids in their pyramids from elementary to HS."

- "Neighborhood school model with strong Level 4 resources → Equity of resources across district."

- "Travel time, which leads into equitable access."

- "Proximity to schools; students end up at schools that don't logically make sense."

- "Proximity of neighborhoods to schools; having contiguous communities – caregiver/community concern."

- "Keeping communities together—aligning neighborhoods from elementary to middle to high school."

- "Proximity to school is vital. Let walkers walk, keep neighborhoods together where possible, please."

- "Focus on community & keeping contiguous communities together in same pyramid."

2. Eliminating Attendance Islands

Attendance islands, where students from a single neighborhood or complex attend schools far from their community, were heavily criticized. These zones often isolate families and disrupt social and academic continuity, which participants argued could be avoided with thoughtful boundary planning. Many attendees called for contiguous attendance zones to prevent these "island" situations.

Why important: Eliminating attendance islands ensures students can attend schools within their communities, reducing feelings of isolation and logistical barriers.

Supporting Quotes:

- "Walt Whitman - 100% bus in - issue of attendance island and can't walk to school."

- "No more split feeders/attendance islands."

- "Minimal change to fix the problems of island schools."

- "Transient apartment complexes can't plan easily if caught in attendance islands."

- "Why is FCPS not taking a more phased approach? Can we not be more effective looking at fixing attendance islands first?"

- "Removal of attendance islands that currently transport children away from their communities."

- "Correct split feeder issue at Crossville Elementary—95% goes to Carson, less than 5% goes to Langston Hughes. No opposition to solving attendance islands."

3. Walkability and Safe Access

Participants highlighted the importance of walkability to schools, especially for younger students, to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce reliance on transportation. Safe routes, including sidewalks and protected crossings, were identified as essential components of walkable neighborhoods. Limited sidewalks and dangerous intersections currently hinder walkability in some areas.

Why important: Ensuring safe and walkable access to schools minimizes transportation dependency, fosters independence, and enhances safety for students.

Supporting Quotes:

- "Proximity to elementary (walkability, can then follow that group onward, more choice with high school options)."

- "Make sure houses within walking distance can have kids walk to their schools."

- "Safety of the walkers → abusers, traffic (roads & sidewalks safe? No crossing roads & busy intersections)."

- "Is Fairfax County addressing sidewalk issues. Also dangerous bus stop locations (Telegraph Road)."

- "Close proximity to the schools increases walkability and decreases travel time."

- "If you can arrange a school group so that they shouldn't have to pass a school on the way to another school"

- "kids should be able to get to their zoned schools without needing buses."

4. Proximity and Equitable Access to Resources

Proximity to schools was tied to equitable access to programs and resources. Families emphasized the importance of having advanced academic programs, extracurricular activities, and after-school programs available within their neighborhoods to reduce the need for extended commutes. Disparities in proximity to resources were noted as a key concern.

Why important: Addressing proximity gaps ensures all students, regardless of where they live, have fair access to quality educational opportunities and support systems.

Supporting Quotes:

- "More equal access to programming or better transportation to centers with that programming (Spanish immersion; IB; AAP)."

- "Equitable mix of students + resources; maintain diversity. Afraid that lower income neighborhoods will all be linked together and lose access to all resources + people."

- "What counts as close proximity? Ease of access? What's the threshold for success throughout this process? Need to know specifically."

- "Capacity & proximity both contribute to access → long commutes miss out on community connections & programming."

- "Equitable access to programs/facilities → proximity + capacity feeds into well-being."

5. Reducing Commute Times and Parental Burden

Long commutes caused by non-contiguous boundaries or illogical zoning decisions were widely criticized. Parents expressed concern about the toll on students' time, extracurricular participation, and sleep, as well as the logistical challenges of managing long distances between home and school. Reducing commute times was seen as a critical goal for boundary adjustments.

Why important: Shortening commute times improves students' well-being, reduces transportation costs, and makes school schedules more manageable for families.

Supporting Quotes:

- "Length of bus ride because they're needing to go beyond their zone."

- "Ensuring proximity of elementary schools—shorter commutes to school for the first few years when kids need the most support and parental involvement."

- "Parents/guardians who don't have cars (navigating transportation in order to pick up students or attend events)."

- "Most families are aware of commute times when moving to a pyramid."

- "Analyze traffic patterns to optimize commute times and integrate into rezoning decisions."

- "People make big life decisions—housing, commutes—based on grouping at schools. This has a big effect on why FCPS is desirable to stay within."

- "Transportation Challenges – What is an acceptable distance for commute? Shortest travel time to school, kids' sleep, bus-driven school costs, # of buses, pollution/traffic congestion."

- "Long commute to middle school and high school: Kids being tired. Less time with family."