FCPS Community Meetings to Discuss School Boundaries

Region 1 (in-person community meeting)

Community Session held December 18, 2024

In November and December 2024, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) held a series of community meetings to gather input for the review of FCPS's school boundaries. During the community sessions, participants split into smaller groups to discuss and share their thoughts on four questions. Notes and insights were recorded on paper, then scanned and converted to text using optical character recognition. This report summarizes the input shared by community members from Region 1 through themes and supporting excerpts. The four questions are as follows:

1. In the introduction, we explored various challenges related to the current school boundaries. Which of those do you feel should be the top priority when we create the boundary scenarios?
2. Based on your experience as a parent/caregiver and/or community member, what are some important data or insights we should consider?
3. What do you hope the outcomes of this boundary review process will be? How could this review process positively impact our community
4. What questions do you have about the next steps in this boundary review process?

Question 1: Challenges

In the introduction, we explored various challenges related to the current school boundaries. Which of those do you feel should be the top priority when we create the boundary scenarios?

Community Stability and Continuity

Community members expressed deep concerns about how boundary changes could disrupt established neighborhoods, friendships, and support systems. Many families purchased homes specifically for access to certain schools, and they fear that rezoning will break apart their local communities. They emphasize that minimizing disruption should be a top priority to ensure stability for students and families.

- "Parents want kids to know the same community for the duration of their education."

- "We chose our community and school—do not disrupt that."

- "Do not break up communities."

- "Grandfather existing students into programs if changes are made."

- "Families purchased homes based on the quality of schools and home values."

Transportation and Proximity Concerns

Many community members are worried about how boundary changes could increase travel time for students, especially younger children. Long commutes can negatively impact student well-being, limit participation in extracurricular activities, and create additional burdens for parents who provide transportation. Some suggest that optimizing bus routes rather than redrawing boundaries could help alleviate capacity issues.

- " Decrease time on buses—avoid high traffic times to shorten commute time."

- "Minimizing disruption for current students and their community."

- "Distance to schools should be shortened."

- "Increased travel time (people traveling farther when other schools are closer)."

- "Transportation challenges/concerns across VDOT and other complicating factors. FCPS should work with urban planning and zoning to plan for new facilities."

Equitable Access to Programs and Resources

Many parents and caregivers believe that the boundary review should focus on ensuring equitable access to high-quality educational programs without requiring students to change schools. They argue that instead of shifting students, resources should be redistributed so that all schools offer strong academic programs, including Advanced Academic Programs (AAP), language immersion, and special education support.

- "Can we tip resources so that all schools have access to the same programs?"

- "Provide similar programs at all schools across the county."

- " Focus on kids' access to programming → increase access to programs, avoid boundary issues, and document how we are not providing access."

- "Programming access → beyond boundary adjustment."

● "Equity of programs—more schools should have programs like language immersion."

Impact on Property Values and Housing Stability

Community members express concern that frequent boundary changes could negatively impact property values and housing stability. Many families have made long-term investments in homes based on school assignments, and they worry that rezoning could reduce their property's worth and affect neighborhood desirability.

● "Impact on property values and economy based on rezoning, with a shift out of public school into private school."

● "People purchased homes in a particular district, and now you're moving kids, and we have a 30-year mortgage."

● "Economic impact and property values—consider trends in new and anticipated housing developments."

● "Property values—parents bought homes in certain areas considering what schools would be attended."

● "Understanding housing projections and investments in Fairfax County."

Special Programs and Student Needs

Many parents are concerned that boundary changes could disrupt students' access to specialized academic programs. They emphasize that some schools offer unique programs, such as advanced academic placement (AAP), language immersion, or special education services, which may not be available elsewhere. Families fear that rezoning could force students to switch schools and lose access to these critical resources.

● "Ensure access to programming (e.g., AAP as an option with transportation provided)."

● "Boundaries won't fix special programs; need to fix with more resources"

● "Capacity of specialized programs at each school should be considered."

● "District could consider creating/moving specialty programs that students apply/get into at under-capacity schools (e.g., pre-law, pre-med, IT) as opposed to forcing students to move, similar to immersion programs."

● "Understanding special needs and availability of programs."

Question 2: Data and Insights

Based on your experience as a parent/caregiver and/or community member, what are some important data or insights we should consider?

School Capacity and Overcrowding

Region 1 community members emphasize that accurate data on school capacity and overcrowding should be a primary focus. They believe that addressing these issues effectively would prevent the need for frequent boundary adjustments and unnecessary disruptions to students' education. They also call for more transparency in how school capacity data is collected and used.

- "What are the current key metrics used by FCPS? Top priorities for decisions: Transport, classroom capacity, etc."

- "Capacity of schools—transparency and access to data."

- "Build-outs of schools based on projected population growth, focusing funding towards overcrowded schools."

- "Capacity issues—not just enrollment but also geographic concerns."

Transportation and Commute Times

Parents are concerned about how boundary changes could lead to longer commutes for students, especially younger children. They stress the importance of using transportation data, including bus routes and travel times, to ensure that students spend minimal time in transit. Additionally, they want more analysis of traffic patterns and potential safety concerns.

- "Early transportation times for kids because of long bus rides → impact on student performance, lack of sleep, mental health/well-being."

- "Distance to schools should be shortened."

- "Increased travel time (people traveling farther when other schools are closer)."

- "Bus routes on major highways—new drivers having to drive on dangerous highways to get to school."

- "Average time spent on the bus currently."

Economic and Housing Impact

Community members want a detailed analysis of how boundary changes could impact property values and neighborhood stability. They believe that families have made significant investments in their homes based on school assignments and that abrupt changes could lead to financial losses and community disruption.

- "Economic impact on communities/neighborhoods."

- "Impact on property values and economy based on rezoning, with a shift out of public school into private school."

- "Taxes for developers to benefit school systems, academic opportunity, facilities, and community."

- "Property value and how redistricting could affect families."

- "Growth/decline in population and uncertainty of the housing market."

Transparency and Data Accuracy

Parents and community members repeatedly stress the need for accurate and transparent data in the boundary decision-making process. They request clear methodologies for data collection, independent reviews of the analysis, and more detailed explanations of why specific changes are being proposed. Many feel that past decisions have lacked clarity and call for a more open process.

- "More data and clarity on big issues. Communicate why exactly these boundary changes are needed. Provide more information behind each issue and more statistics."

- "What are the methods of how they're analyzing data?"

- "What is the methodology for data collection?"

- "Will details be provided to the community prior to the decision-making process? Will we get more detail on big issues?"

- "Use a neutral and objective survey method to gather data."

Question 3: Outcomes

What do you hope the outcomes of this boundary review process will be? How could this review process positively impact our community?

Community Stability and Continuity

Many community members hope that the boundary review process will prioritize maintaining community stability. They emphasize the importance of keeping neighborhoods together, minimizing disruption for families, and allowing siblings to stay in the same schools. They also advocate for long-term consistency to avoid frequent changes that could create instability for students.

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

- "Avoiding feeder school splitting."

- " Minimize the disruption to families by allowing phasing and not moving families multiple times. Allow families/siblings the choice to remain in old boundaries."

- "Frequent adjustments (e.g., every 5 years) are too frequent, especially for larger families."

Equitable Distribution of Resources

Parents and caregivers strongly advocate for an equitable distribution of resources across all schools. They want the review process to ensure that specialized programs, academic opportunities, and extracurricular activities are available at every school, reducing the need for students to transfer for better opportunities.

- "Rebalancing programs equitably throughout the county."

- "Put funding to improve educational and other support programs at the schools/students that need them."

- "AAP should be in every school."

- "Bring programs to students, not vice versa."

- " Distribution of resources → more resources (teachers), not boundaries. The same with programming."

Long-Term Planning and Stability

Families want to ensure that the boundary review process leads to long-term stability. They argue that frequent boundary changes cause uncertainty and disrupt students' education. Instead of frequent adjustments, they advocate for well-thought-out, sustainable solutions that prevent the need for continuous rezoning.

- "Have these reviews less frequent than every 5 years; it will be too disruptive."

- "A phased approach—allow older students to stay in their schools longer/give a choice."

- "Stability for kids and families as they change."

- "Consider past impacts of rezoning when planning for the future."

- "Transparency of long-term plans for ongoing boundary changes to reduce disruption."

Minimal Disruption to Students

A major concern among parents is that boundary changes should minimize disruption to students' education and social networks. They argue that children should be able to complete their schooling in familiar environments, and any necessary changes should be implemented gradually to reduce stress and anxiety.

- "Students are grandfathered to finish in the high school pyramid they have started at after any rezoning."

- "Minimize disruptions to students and families for their K–12 experience."

- "Grandfathering in students who have already started school—especially older grades."

- "Protecting students' interest and minimizing change. Phased approach—allow older students to stay in their schools longer/give a choice."

- "Balance the negative and positive impacts of changes—minimize disruption."

Question 4: Questions

What questions do you have about the next steps in this boundary review process?

Process Transparency and Community Input

Many community members expressed concerns about the transparency of the boundary review process. They want clarity on how decisions will be made, what data will be used, and how much weight community feedback will carry. There is a desire for more public engagement, detailed reports, and opportunities for meaningful input before final decisions are made.

- "How much will community feedback actually influence the process?"

- "Will some communities be prioritized over others?"

- "Are draft scenarios being shared with the public?"

- "What is the scope of this boundary review mandate?"

- "How will FCPS ensure transparency?"

- "Will details be provided to the community prior to the decision-making process? Will we get more detail on big issues?"

- "What does the data collection process look like?"

Grandfathering and Transition Plans

Parents are concerned about how students will transition if boundary changes occur. Many want assurances that students currently enrolled in schools will not be forced to transfer mid-education. Grandfathering policies, phased transitions, and special accommodations for siblings are key topics of concern.

- "Will there be any grandfathering of students? How will any changes be implemented?"

- "How will FCPS grandfather students, especially for siblings?"

- "Will siblings be separated?"

- "How gradually is rollout? Phase-in?"

- "What would transitions to new schools look like?"

- "Once they come up with a plan, will they provide alternative solutions beyond boundary reviews?"

Timeline and Implementation of Changes

Many families are seeking clear timelines for when boundary changes will be decided and implemented. They want to know whether changes will happen gradually or all at once and how long they will have to adjust before any changes take effect.

- "What's the timeline? (FEB 2026 approved, Fall 2026-2027 start?)"

- "Why are we changing boundary reviews from every 40 years to every 5 years? Why not go to every 20 years?"

- "Will schools be closer to homes (student-focused)?"

- "Will there be actions taken after initial scenario development?"

- "Will we see draft proposals?"

- "How much time will parents have to review the proposals? Want adequate time for parents to review and respond."

Criteria for Decision-Making

Parents and caregivers want to understand what factors are being prioritized in the boundary review process. They question whether academic performance, school resources, transportation, or socio-economic factors will be weighted most heavily in decision-making. There is a general concern about ensuring fairness and avoiding decisions that disproportionately affect specific communities.

- "What are the top priorities that FCPS is facing? Transportation challenges or delivery for realignment?"

- "How are we prioritizing the process—fiscal vs. services?"

- "How are we evaluating cost vs. access to program/neighborhood school?"

- "What is the driver in the process? (Boundary map, overcrowding)"

- "How will you balance? What will drive ultimate decision-making in this process?"

- "What are the particular decision points? And will there be transparency?"

5. Impact on Schools and Resources

Community members are asking how boundary changes will impact the quality of education, availability of programs, and resource allocation. There are concerns that some schools will be negatively affected, while others may not see any meaningful improvements.

- "Will FCPS consider adding new schools as needed?"

- "What is a comprehensive economic analysis on the impact of boundary rezoning changes?"

- "Are there underpopulated schools?"

- "How much of a difference will balancing all of this make in terms of class size?"

- "Would FCPS consider adding to the current school footprints to make current schools larger?"

- "What would be the funding model to ensure schools maintain quality programming?"