

FCPS Community Meetings to Discuss School Boundaries

Region 3 (in-person community meeting)

Community Session held December 9, 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 3 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?

Overcrowding and Enrollment Capacity

Community members are deeply concerned about overcrowding in schools, which affects both students' learning experiences and the availability of resources. Many schools have exceeded their capacity, resulting in limited classroom space, stretched staffing, and decreased access to

extracurricular programs. Parents and caregivers emphasize the need for boundary adjustments that alleviate overcrowding while maintaining community cohesion.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Enrollment capacity - In some cases, not enough lockers, issues with sports equity in competition amongst teams."
- "Overcrowded schools."
- "Class crowding in some elementary schools (e.g., Waynewood)."
- "Enrollment/capacity - teacher burnout with larger class sizes."
- "Capacity - enough space in school buildings → avoid overcrowding in schools & student/teacher ratio is appropriate."

Equitable Access to Programs and Resources

Many parents and caregivers feel that school boundaries should ensure equitable access to educational programs, including special education, language immersion, and advanced placement courses. The current boundaries often create disparities, where some students have access to advanced academic programs while others do not. The community wants fairness in how educational opportunities are distributed.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Need programming to be roughly equivalent everywhere."
- "Access to programming - Pre-K, after school; services within community remain available."
- "More equal access to programming or better transportation to centers with that programming (Spanish immersion; IB; AAP)."
- "Access to programming causing class sizes to fluctuate - large class sizes for the programs dilute the effectiveness of the program."
- "Equitable access to programs/facilities → proximity + capacity feeds into well-being."

Transportation and Proximity Concerns

Transportation is a significant challenge, with many students experiencing long bus rides due to current boundary assignments. Some communities struggle with a lack of safe walking routes, forcing children to rely entirely on buses. Families believe that proximity should be a key factor in boundary adjustments to support student well-being and minimize travel burdens.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Proximity to elementary (walkability, can then follow that group onward, more choice with high school options)."
- "Transportation because limited sidewalks and options without buses."
- "Better bus routes - less passing of other schools, shorter rides/distance to stops."
- "Bus length time - Walt Whitman - no one can walk. Kids can't stay for afterschool. Sleep."
- "Transportation → don't want children on the bus forever or miss bus."

Question 2: Data and Insights

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

Enrollment Trends and Capacity Forecasting

Community members emphasize the importance of accurate, long-term enrollment projections to ensure that school boundaries are adjusted proactively rather than reactively. Many feel that past boundary changes have not accounted for future population growth, leading to continued overcrowding or underutilized school buildings.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Consider those already overcapacity, including 5/10 year timelines and construction/new developments."
- "Finding a way to level out capacity in a small area (w/in 10 minutes)."
- "Planned development and future population in the next 5-10 years."
- "Class sizes are the most important to help kids establish a strong foundation."
- "Have they done studies on why some schools are overcrowded and some are under?"

Equitable Access to Specialized Programs

Many parents express concerns over the unequal distribution of advanced academic programs, language immersion, and special education services. They believe boundary adjustments should increase equitable access to these programs, so no student is forced to travel excessive distances to receive specialized instruction.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Expand IB/AP offerings."
- "Advanced programs center vs local → something at every school."
- "Some students that go to MV went to Sandburg and don't have the IB middle years program → harder to jump into IB."
- "What advanced academic programs are offered in the area? At each school? Why isn't everything offered at all schools?"
- "Equitability of languages + economic advantages."

Transportation and Commute Time

A significant concern among community members is the length of bus rides and the impact of transportation on students' daily lives. Many parents feel that boundary adjustments should prioritize keeping students closer to their schools to reduce travel times and improve participation in extracurricular activities.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Length of bus ride because they're needing to go beyond their zone."
- "Transportation routes - understanding future road construction considerations."
- "Better bus routes - less passing of other schools, shorter rides/distance to stops."
- "Parents/guardians who don't have cars (navigating transportation in order to pick up students or attend events)."
- "Safer commutes for kids - no crossing dangerous roads."

Diversity and Socioeconomic Equity

Community members highlight concerns about how boundary changes might impact school diversity and socioeconomic balance. They want data on the potential effects of rezoning on racial, ethnic, and economic diversity to ensure that schools remain inclusive and representative of the broader community.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Diversity - risks of loss of ethnic/racial or socioeconomic diversity."
- "Balance Income-Based Families equally per area."
- "Title I funding – will FCPS lose significant federal funding?"
- "How will special programs be allotted or changed in Title I schools to build up population (Spanish immersion, AAP)?"
- "Resource support needs to be standard: autism, language barriers, learning differences."

Data Transparency and Community Trust

Many community members express frustration over past boundary changes that lacked transparency. They want clear, publicly available data on how decisions are being made, with opportunities for parents and stakeholders to provide input before final decisions are reached.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Will they share draft data collection?"
- "We want transparency and hope the school board will take the opportunity to be clear and open."
- "Transparency of the process → how and by who will data be analyzed."
- "How much of this process will be data-driven vs. opinions?"
- "Full transparency due to lack of trust in previous decisions."

Stability and Continuity for Students

Another key issue is minimizing disruptions for students who may have to change schools due to boundary adjustments. Parents and caregivers advocate for a thoughtful transition plan that includes 'grandfathering' options for currently enrolled students and keeping siblings together in the same schools.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "History/continuity within a community and a school - siblings having attended, moving between schools instead of staying in one long term."
- "Ensuring consistency for families & current students + siblings."
- "Does a student have a real chance of staying with an ES/MS/HS track that is shared by peers/friends?"
- "How well the transition to new boundaries work? Will they grandfather students? Ensure least disruptive transition."
- "Need to consider social/emotional well-being of students having to move to different school and make new friend groups."

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?

Equitable Access to Resources and Programs

Community members strongly emphasize the need for equitable access to educational resources across all schools. They believe that every school should have the same quality of programs, specialized learning opportunities, and extracurricular activities, ensuring that students do not need to travel long distances for better education.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Build equity in schools - same programming should run throughout and same experience across the whole of FCPS."
- "Inclusion of more programs at all of the schools."
- "Equitable at all schools, esp. AAP."
- "Equity of programs."
- "If every school is equitable in student count, then more funds can be used for programs."

Minimizing Disruptions and Ensuring Stability

Families are concerned about frequent boundary changes disrupting students' educational journeys. Many expressed the importance of maintaining continuity for students and minimizing unnecessary disruptions to peer groups and learning environments.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Least amount of change with biggest effect, with focus on pockets that have been biggest problems."
- "Do not want to change locations of currently enrolled students."
- "Stability for our kids - less disruption."
- "Understanding the diversity of opinions throughout the county."
- "Grandfathering students & siblings already enrolled in schools so they aren't impacted."

Improving Transportation and Walkability

Parents and caregivers believe that school boundaries should prioritize shorter commute times, safer walking routes, and improved transportation logistics. Many feel that long bus rides negatively affect student well-being and after-school participation.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Less bussing needed, shorter routes, fewer buses."
- "Kids stay in the school closest to their home (walkability if possible)."
- "Safer commutes for kids - no crossing dangerous roads."
- "Shorter bus rides - no dawn/dusk waiting."

Transparency and Community Trust in the Process

Many community members feel that past boundary reviews lacked transparency and public input. They want a clear, data-driven decision-making process with regular updates and opportunities for the community to weigh in.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "We want transparency and hope the school board will take the opportunity to be clear and open."
- "Full transparency due to lack of trust in previous decisions."
- "Transparency around the data collected, how it's collected & analyzed (make sure not 'gerrymandering' the boundaries)."
- "How much of this process will be data-driven vs. opinions?"
- "Community feels process is secure and parents' voices are heard."

Addressing Overcrowding and Facility Utilization

A significant concern is the imbalance in school capacity, with some schools experiencing overcrowding while others remain underutilized. The community wants boundary changes to alleviate pressure on overfilled schools while ensuring efficient use of existing facilities.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Address overcrowding."
- "Relieve some pressure on over-capacity schools."
- "More stable enrollment and more even enrollment throughout the district - equitable class sizes."

- "Reducing overcrowding - Ensuring there's enough space in the county for all students (without modules)."
- "Where do we put a new school(s)?"

Strengthening Community and Student Well-being

Many parents express the hope that boundary adjustments will help build stronger school communities where students feel a sense of belonging. They believe maintaining social connections is essential for emotional well-being and academic success.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Biggest scatter happens at high school - prioritize maintaining elementary and middle groups and high school choice."
- "Students & families want to feel like they are in a synchronous community."
- "Community buy-in + support, more engagement."
- "More community identity."
- "Participation from all parents."

Question 4: Questions About the Process

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

Transparency in Decision-Making

Community members repeatedly express concerns about the transparency of the boundary review process. They want to know how decisions are being made, who is responsible for data analysis, and whether the public will have access to the data before decisions are finalized.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "Will they share draft data collection?"
- "Will all data collection be available to the public?"
- "Transparency of the process → how and by who will data be analyzed."
- "What will we be told vs. what is kept private?"
- "Are the analyzers from FFX community → need to be people who understand how we operate in Fairfax County."

Implementation Timeline and Transition Plan

Many parents and caregivers are eager for details about how and when changes will be implemented. They are concerned about how long the transition will take, whether there will be a phased rollout, and how students currently enrolled in affected schools will be accommodated.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "What's the implementation timeline, transition rollout plan, grandfathering (this part needs community engagement)?"
- "How long for implementation? Next school year?"
- "Grandfathering procedures for siblings and ensuring consistency for kids → Will draft rules include these procedures?"
- "When are outside consultants leading, and when is the district?"
- "Will boundary review occur again in a few years?"

Community Engagement and Input

Parents and community members want assurance that their voices will be heard throughout the process. They have concerns about whether there will be sufficient opportunities for public input, whether all voices (especially from underrepresented communities) will be included, and if feedback will actually influence decisions.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "How hard are they trying to reach out to community? Many low-income families or new to country don't access school emails."
- "How much input will parents have once a proposal is made? How much weight will our voices have?"
- "Will the community see the data?"
- "What level of feedback will be accepted from the community once a draft plan is released?"
- "We should have votes like they allow community to vote on calendar."

Funding and Resource Allocation

There are concerns about how the boundary review process will impact school funding and resource allocation. Some community members worry about whether schools will receive adequate support following boundary changes and how funding decisions will be made.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "What funds are associated with this, will we be considering investment in any construction, as well as maintenance?"
- "How will resources get distributed after final boundary changes?"
- "Allocation of Title 1 funding – what would happen if less concentrated need in some areas?"
- "Are salaries for FCPS competitive with surrounding districts?"
- "Will new school plans be factored in?"

Impact on Students and Educational Programs

Community members are concerned about how boundary changes will affect students academically and socially. Many want to understand how program availability will be affected and whether students will have to switch schools in the middle of their academic journey.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "How will the boundary changes specifically impact students requiring more services?"
- "How do you plan to ensure Region 3 gets the same resources as other regions?"
- "Will programs move with students? If my student goes from a school with AAP, or a basketball team, will those programs be available there?"
- "Ensuring that all families, from various communities, are aware of all options."
- "How well will the transition to new boundaries work? Will they grandfather students? Ensure least disruptive transition."

Coordination with County and Other External Factors

Some community members are interested in how the boundary review process will coordinate with other county-level planning efforts, such as transportation, zoning, and school construction projects.

Supporting Excerpts:

- "How is FCPS working with the County departments of transportation, planning/zoning (too many siloes)?"
- "Who is responsible for communication with county planning commissions - huge influx of population in a specific boundary can cause major equity issues."
- "Will the proposed plan be shared before approval?"
- "What external factors will be addressed, such as tools that can be used besides boundaries to solve problems?"

- "Will public be given a chance to vote on it?"