

FCPS Community Meetings to Discuss School Boundaries

Region 4 (in-person community meeting)

Community Session held December 3, 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 4 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?

Stability and Continuity for Students

Community members strongly emphasize the need for stability in school boundaries to ensure children can remain with their peers and maintain consistency in their educational environment. Frequent changes to boundaries disrupt friendships, academic progress, and emotional well-being. Many parents purchased homes based on current school assignments and feel frustrated when those boundaries are altered.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Stability in boundaries -> community is so important, don't change every 5 years."
- "Mental health of students - students suffer from uncertainty."
- "Children suffer because they are placed at schools not where they live."
- "Don't want kids to be split up from their current peer group -> Phased in approach."
- "Grandfathering students in is super important – shorter times on buses."

Equitable Access to Programs and Resources

Parents and caregivers express concerns about unequal access to specialized programs such as Advanced Academic Programs (AAP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Special Education services. They feel that all schools should offer a comprehensive range of academic opportunities, so students do not need to travel long distances or be reassigned to access quality programs.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Ensuring equitable access (AAP programs, Special Education) for all schools."
- "Access to programming, while important, should not require redistricting."
- "Programs in schools so you don't need to transfer -> Grandfathering students in is super important."
- "Schools should already be offered programs across all schools."
- "What does equal access to programs really mean? Schools have everything, but will programming be added everywhere or will it be taken away?"

Transportation and Proximity Considerations

Many community members believe that proximity to schools should be prioritized to reduce long bus rides and ensure convenience for families. Concerns about young children spending excessive time commuting, crossing dangerous roads, and having to rely on buses instead of being able to walk to school are frequently mentioned.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Proximity is our priority – better attendance."
- "Transportation time (time on the bus for 30 mins) -> Age of student -> Walkability, cold/hot."
- "Minimizing travel time."
- "Protecting walkability to bus riders."
- "Don't cross major highways/interstates."

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?

Accuracy and Transparency of Data

Community members emphasize the need for accurate, reliable data to guide boundary decisions. They express concerns that past projections have been inaccurate, leading to flawed planning. Transparency in data sources and methodology is also a top priority to ensure trust in the process.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Data is wrong; current projections are not accurate."
- "Is the current attendance accurate? (Validate attendance)."
- "reliable and accurate audits of residency to alleviate pressure on schools."
- "Accurate data—where is the data coming from?"
- "Will the data (information) reflect current trends"

Equity in Educational Opportunities

Community members stress the importance of ensuring that all students have equal access to high-quality programs and resources, regardless of their assigned school. They express concerns about disparities between schools and want a fair distribution of specialized programs.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Ensuring equitable access (AAP programs, Special Education) for all schools."
- "What does equal access to programs really mean? Schools have everything, but will programming be added everywhere or will it be taken away?"
- "Look at balancing capacity and under-enrolled schools to identify need."
- "Equity adjustments—establish where more teachers need to go and ensure programming equity."
- "How do we use lower-performing schools as a standard? Redistricting isn't working because it will move students to schools that have lower class sizes and lower support"

Long-Term Planning and Growth Management

Community members stress the importance of planning for future population growth and development to prevent frequent boundary changes. They want school boundaries to be sustainable and account for long-term demographic shifts.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Consider urban planners and third parties (employers, military, zoning)."
- "Long-term planning—looking @ community growth + new developments."
- "Upcoming construction → use this to protect capacity issues."
- "Make sure that growth trends are factored into boundary planning."

Property Values and Economic Impact

Some community members express concern about how boundary changes may affect property values. They worry that reassignment to a lower-performing school could impact real estate demand and the economic stability of neighborhoods.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Home property prices—how would shifting boundaries impact property values?"
- "Minimizing adverse impact on property values should be a priority."
- "Data on the economic impact on property values and the community as a whole."
- "Return on investment on property values + tangible & intangible student success"

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?

Transparency and Trust in Decision-Making

Community members emphasize the need for transparency in how boundary decisions are made. They want clear explanations for changes, opportunities to provide meaningful input, and trustworthy processes that ensure decisions reflect the community's best interests.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Transparent → publish decision-making process."
- "If transparency is achieved (based on varying standards), it could restore trust in those in charge."
- "Parents made decisions based on where kids go to school on current boundaries."
- "Process stays local and community makes the decision."
- "We want to know if our voices will actually be heard."

Keeping Neighborhoods and Communities Intact

Many community members want boundary changes to keep neighborhoods together. They are concerned about students being separated from their friends, disrupting their academic and social lives.

Sample Exerpts:

- "Don't break up neighborhoods."
- "Realigning split feeder situations and reunited communities."
- "Keeping communities together helps create a stable, supportive environment for students."
- "Kids from the same street going to the same school."
- "Ensuring minimal disruption to neighborhood schools."

Equitable Access to Programs and Resources

Many parents want to ensure that students across different schools have access to the same educational opportunities, such as special programs, extracurricular activities, and quality teachers.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Equity adjustments—establish where more teachers need to go and ensure programming equity."
- "Alleviate over-enrollment issues to build new access to programs where needed."
- "Increased staffing to increase equal access to programs."
- "High-quality schools that have lots of offerings."
- "Provide better access to the same programs across schools so families don't need to change for equity."

Stability for Students and Families

Families express concerns about frequent school reassignments disrupting students' education, social networks, and family logistics. They hope for policies that prioritize stability and minimize unnecessary changes.

Sample excerpts:

- "Neighborhood stability → planning for demographic changes."
- "Minimize change to protect student well-being."
- "Staying in the current school pyramid."
- "Changes should be given slowly + at natural transitions for example Elem to Middle school."

Improved Transportation and Commute Efficiency

Many community members believe school boundary changes should reduce long bus rides and transportation inefficiencies, allowing students to attend schools closer to home for a better overall experience.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Improvements in travel time, class sizes, etc. will help shift focus to improving education of our children."
- "Reducing commutes – try to keep students closer to home school."
- "Reducing use of buses if attendance islands or major bus rides are impacted."
- "Protecting walkability to bus riders."
- "Less crowded on buses."

Question 4: Questions About the Process

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

Implementation Timeline and Phased Approach

Parents and caregivers want clarity on when boundary changes will take effect and whether they will be implemented gradually. They worry about the speed of changes and the impact on students currently enrolled in affected schools.

Sample Excerpts:

- "When will changes go into effect?"
- "Can you do the implementation in a phased manner?"
- "What is the plan for reviewing programs?"
- "Can we extend this to Fall of 2026? What is the rush?"
- "Will the changes be implemented in shifts or piecemeal? Or will they be made all at once?"

Grandfathering Policies for Students

A major concern among families is whether students currently enrolled in a school will be allowed to complete their education there, particularly for students in their final years. They seek clarity on whether younger siblings will also be permitted to attend the same school as their older siblings.

Sample excerpts:

- "Are they going to grandfather kids?"
- "Will seniors be grandfathered into being able to stay at their current school for their last year?"
- "What will the grandfathering process look like?"
- "How will students who started attending a school be impacted by the changes?"

Transparency and Decision-Making Process

Many community members are concerned about the transparency of the boundary review process. They want to understand who is making the decisions, how community input is being considered, and what criteria will ultimately guide the final boundary changes.

Sample Excerpts:

- "How will the school board demonstrate transparency to individual parents?"
- "Will there be a public display or release of notes from breakout sessions at meetings?"
- "Why wasn't this process more transparent?"
- "Are you gathering data properly or cherry-picking for results?"
- "How are priorities weighted?"

Impact on Transportation and Commutes

Many parents worry about how boundary changes will affect transportation logistics, including bus routes, commute times, and walkability to schools. They are particularly concerned about whether transportation costs and efficiency will be factored into the decision-making process.

Sample Excerpts:

- "Is transportation the biggest issue?"
- "Are transportation costs be in line with other districts of our size?"
- " How does this impact school start times & transportation?"