

# FCPS Community Meetings to Discuss School Boundaries

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## Region 5 (in-person community meeting)

Community Session held December 2, 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 5 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?*

## Equitable Access and Resource Distribution

Community members are deeply concerned about ensuring that all students have access to quality educational resources regardless of their assigned school. Many feel that boundary changes should be designed to distribute students and funding more evenly to avoid resource-rich and resource-poor schools. They worry about the impact of shifting school boundaries on program availability, particularly for advanced academic programs and special

education services. The potential disparity in school performance levels further fuels anxiety, as families express concerns that some children may be placed in lower-performing schools with fewer opportunities.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Impacts of being assigned to a poorer performing high school will impact family tough decisions to leave the district and go private.”
- “Association being with a low-performing school will impact home values. People choose/own property based on schools.”
- “Making assistance programs (i.e., food/lunch programs) equally available to all schools/assistance (consistently).”
- “Keep children and families with their current peers to maintain stability.”

## Transportation and Proximity Challenges

Many parents expressed frustration over long travel times for students due to current school boundary structures. A major concern is the inconvenience of children being assigned to schools far from their homes while closer schools have available space. This not only increases commuting time but also affects after-school participation, family logistics, and student well-being. Concerns were also raised about transportation availability, bus shortages, and safety hazards when students have to cross major roads to reach their assigned schools.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Minimizing travel time to/from school → Avoiding having to cross major arteries (Beltway), traffic and safety concerns, costs of travel.”
- “Proximity—H.S. is 9 miles away. Kids who grew up together are not in the same high school.”
- “Bussing students long distances when there’s another school closer by doesn't make sense.”
- “Transportation should be improved rather than moving students.
- “Transportation proximity: Elem (15-30 min), Middle (30 min), High school (30 min) — these should be the max limits.”

## Overcrowding and Infrastructure Limitations

School capacity is a major source of stress for the community. Many schools are at or above capacity, leading to the use of temporary trailers and strained resources. Conversely, some schools are under-enrolled, causing inefficient use of space and resources. The community is urging a long-term approach to school boundary adjustments that factors in projected housing

developments and enrollment trends, rather than reactive measures that may need further revision in a few years.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Schools should get less crowded.”
- “Longer facility renovation wait times and high renovation costs.”
- “Building permits aren’t being considered with regards to local schools’ capacity.”
- “New schools should be built as the new neighborhoods are being built/developed. This is done for Fire Rescue... why not for schools?”

## Transparency and Community Involvement

Many community members expressed concerns about the transparency of the decision-making process. They emphasized the need for clear communication from school officials and meaningful opportunities for parental and community involvement. There is a widespread perception that previous decisions were made without sufficient community input, and parents want assurances that their voices will be heard before any major changes take place.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Transparency of what data is being considered & weighting of criteria?”
- “Can we access all scenarios/drafts shown to the committee/school board/superintendent?”
- “Robust community input that is accurately recorded & strongly considered.”
- “Transparency in decision-making.”

## 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?*

## Housing and Development Trends

Attendees expressed the need for boundary adjustments to reflect projected housing developments and zoning laws. They stressed that school capacity and demographic projections should be analyzed based on anticipated growth patterns, ensuring schools are neither overcrowded nor underutilized.

#### Supporting Excerpts:

- “Projected housing data → Focus on mixed-use/growth areas → most redistricting should focus on these, not single-family home-dominated districts.”
- “Capital Improvement Plan → future building.”
- “Include upcoming housing development data for population density.”
- “New schools should be built as new neighborhoods are being developed—this is done for Fire Rescue, why not for schools?”
- “Assessment of community/neighborhood boundaries as a way to keep neighborhoods together.”

## Transportation and Commute Time

Many parents expressed frustration about long student commute times and inefficient transportation routes. They feel data on traffic patterns, road safety, and bus availability should be thoroughly analyzed before making any changes to school boundaries. The importance of maintaining reasonable commute times for students was highlighted as a key concern.

#### Supporting Excerpts:

- “Drive time data & max acceptable distance.”
- “Walkability & feature mapping (don’t cross interstates if at all possible e.g., safe routes to school).”
- “Transportation Run (length of travel time).”
- “Look/share what FCPS is doing with the county planners to solve problems with city rather than moving students.”
- “Students waking up 5-6 a.m. to get on bus for school. Time for after-school activities & sleeping enough to be alert for school.”

## Mental Health and Student Well-Being

A significant concern for the community is the impact of boundary changes on students' mental health and well-being. Parents worry that frequent changes to school assignments disrupt students' stability, leading to anxiety, stress, and decreased academic performance. There is also concern about how school moves affect students receiving special education services.

#### Supporting Excerpts:

- “Mental health → Ensurance of the kid → A result of constant forced changes → especially for special needs.”
- “Impact on mental health for students, already disrupted due to COVID → impacts on school performance, mental health, literacy.”

- “Mental health of students – research (many studies) show reduced graduation rates with a single move K-12.”
- “Changing schools will likely impact student performance negatively – added mental health in a time when students are experiencing high rates of anxiety.”

## Transparency and Data Accuracy

Community members emphasized the need for transparency in how data is collected and used in the boundary review process. Many expressed skepticism about past redistricting efforts and want clear, publicly available information on how decisions are made, what data is being analyzed, and how weighting factors are determined.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “How will all data + analyses be shared during & throughout process transparently?”
- “Publish everything from raw growth projections/enrollment projections on website.”
- “Transparency process: What is their long-term/beyond experts – who was used to do this job?”
- “What is the weighting of the criteria for the decisions?”

## 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?*

### Preserving Community and School Pyramids

Community members expressed a strong desire to maintain existing school pyramids to preserve community bonds and neighborhood stability. Many believe that consistent school assignments help students maintain friendships and a sense of belonging, reducing the anxiety associated with changing schools. Concerns were also raised about disruptions caused by frequent boundary adjustments.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Keeping Mantua/Frost/Woodson pyramid and community together – it works!”
- “Neighborhoods don’t get split apart.”
- “Preserving communities, which are built slowly in comparison to boundary changes.”
- “Would like to have options to remain at the same school instead of being forced.”

- “Consistency for kids/families + allow for ensuring they remain on a single path rather than potentially being changed @ 5 yrs.”

## Reducing Transportation Burdens

Participants voiced concerns about the impact of boundary changes on student commute times. Many hope the review process will prioritize minimizing long bus rides and ensuring safe, walkable routes to school. There is a strong sentiment that students should not be required to travel excessive distances when nearby schools have available capacity.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Minimizing travel/transportation time.”
- “Maximizing travel/transportation safety for students (students not having to drive on highways 495, 66).”
- “Students waking up 5-6 a.m. to get on the bus for school. Time for after-school activities & sleeping enough to be alert for school.”
- “We hope that all of our children stay at the same school (4/4).”

## Ensuring Equity in Resource Distribution

Many community members emphasized the importance of balancing student enrollment across schools while ensuring equitable access to academic and extracurricular opportunities. Some expressed concerns that boundary changes could inadvertently concentrate resources in some schools while depleting them in others.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Better resource allocation.”
- “Equitable access to school programming without degrading access for any student.”
- “Elimination of split feeders.”
- “Balance of academic performance. Concentration of high-performing students and programs makes some schools too competitive and others not competitive enough.”
- “Stimulate investment in underserved schools.”

## Enhancing Transparency and Community Involvement

There is widespread demand for greater transparency in the boundary review process, with many attendees expressing skepticism about whether their feedback will truly influence decisions. Community members want clear criteria for boundary changes and opportunities for continued engagement throughout the decision-making process.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “More transparency from School Board re: how they are prioritizing.”
- “ALL at our table agree: Best outcome is solving problems WITHOUT making programmatic change Redistricting.”
- “Understanding what information/data is being prioritized by advisory board.”
- “Collecting data to justify a pre-existing path + using a consultant firm that isn’t even based in VA.”

## Addressing Mental Health and Student Well-Being

A recurring theme in discussions was the potential mental health impact of frequent school changes. Many parents expressed concerns that boundary adjustments could create instability for students, exacerbating stress and anxiety, particularly for those already struggling due to past disruptions like COVID-19.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Impact on mental health for students, already disrupted due to COVID → impacts on school performance, mental health, literacy.”
- “Mental health of students – research (many studies) show reduced graduation rates with a single move K-12.”
- “Changing schools will likely impact student performance negatively – added mental health in a time when students are experiencing high rates of anxiety.”
- “Safety, schools – mental health.”

## 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 expressed concerns about the transparency of the boundary review process. They want clarity on how decisions are made, what data is being used, and how community input will be incorporated. Many attendees are skeptical about whether the final decisions will truly reflect the concerns and priorities of families.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “How will all data + analyses be shared during & throughout process transparently + before March 2025 meeting?”
- “What is the weighting of the criteria for the decisions?”
- “What information are you using & how will you weigh each factor?”
- “How can people get involved in the actual decision-making? Who are the people? Is it true they had to sign an NDA?”

## Timeline and Implementation Process

Many parents want a clearer timeline for how and when boundary changes will be implemented. They are concerned about whether the changes will be phased in gradually or applied all at once, and whether there will be flexibility to accommodate families who may be heavily impacted.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “When does this actually take effect? When would boundaries be redrawn & how will this be phased in?”
- “Will you consider alterations to your current timeline & phasing based on community feedback? March 2025 is far too close → SLOW DOWN!”
- “What is the timeline for execution in the plan? Are students grandfathered in?”
- “Will Phase 2 meetings be at every school or district-wide again? (District-wide is not useful.)”
- “What will implementation look like? Is this too much change? i.e., changing bell schedules, how does this impact CSS schools?”

## Community Input and Decision-Making Authority

There is widespread concern about how community input will be used in the final decisions. Some community members feel that past feedback has been ignored, and they want reassurances that their voices will be heard. There are also concerns about who is making the final decisions and whether they have direct ties to the community.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “How much community input is actually going to be used?”
- “What impact does our feedback have on the draft scenarios and school board decision?”
- “Who are decision-makers – share names! and emails/qualifications (and address). Do they have kids?”



- “How do we get involved again in Stage 2? Will the impacted schools & communities have a chance to discuss together?”
- “Why is FCPS not taking a more phased approach in favor of rip bandaid?”

## Mental Health and Student Well-Being

Parents are deeply concerned about how boundary changes will impact students' mental health and well-being. They want assurances that student anxiety, transitions, and academic performance will be taken into consideration when making adjustments.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “How will FCPS mitigate negative impacts on students’ mental health?”
- “Is FCPS working in concert with mental health advocates to cushion the disruption for students?”
- “Changing schools will likely impact student performance negatively – added mental health in a time when students are experiencing high rates of anxiety.”
- “Students should not experience a reboundary shift every five years. How do we remedy this possibility?”
- “We hope the outcome of the process will not be disruptive to parents and children, or negatively impact children socially and academically.”

## Data Accuracy and Long-Term Planning

Many community members raised concerns about how data is being used to justify boundary changes. They want assurances that the data is accurate, up to date, and considers long-term population and housing trends rather than short-term fixes.

Supporting Excerpts:

- “Will you share the hard data analysis with the community?”
- “How is FCPS calculating enrollment projections? Accounting for development/planned approvals?”
- “What data are you actually using? Please give actual numbers/spreadsheets with the ‘data’ instead of just saying ‘data is being used.’”
- “Is a possible outcome of this process status quo or limited changes?”
- “Why do new communities from new development & split pyramid boundaries get priority over long-term communities?”