

December 12, 2018

Mr. Dan Drake
Interim Chief Operations Officer
DeKalb County School District
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Re: Druid Hills Cluster Elementary Redistricting – Staff Recommending Plan

Dear Mr. Drake,

Thank you and the entire DeKalb County School District (DCSD) Team for creating an open forum at each of the three rounds of Druid Hills Elementary Redistricting to receive community input and feedback. As the Fernbank Principal Advisory Council (PAC), we have attended each of the public meetings and followed up each by meeting and sharing the plans with our parents.

Most recently, we have reviewed and discussed the Staff Recommended Plan. Based on our review plus the input of our parents and members of the community, we believe this plan achieves the goals of both the primary and secondary redistricting criteria by: minimizing traffic and safety patterns; keeping neighborhoods intact; providing for contiguous attendance boundaries; minimizing the need for further redistricting in the near-term by not adding another approximately 244 early education students into the cluster at this time and prior to building an additional large capacity elementary school in the cluster. The Fernbank PAC view the current plan as favorable to Fernbank and the cluster overall, with the following provisions:

1. Given the various programs provided to Fernbank's students and the use of facility classrooms, Fernbank's functional student capacity is 900.

The 900-student capacity was originally submitted by the District to the Georgia Department of Education (GADE) for Fernbank and other schools using the same or similar design. That figure was arrived at because Fernbank and the other schools with a similar design have 58 Instructional Units ("IUs") primarily used for instruction. The 58 IUs consist of 56 classrooms, one media center, and one gym.

However, in the Staff Recommended Plan, Fernbank is listed as having a student capacity of 950. Based on our PAC's conversations with DCSD Staff, this change was made because the GADE considers any space 600 square feet or larger that is regularly used for instruction as an IU and the prototypical building plan from which Fernbank was built has three such spaces, which were not originally included in the 58 IU count. Consequently, GADE considers Fernbank to have 61 IUs and therefore increased the published capacity to 950 students.

Furthermore, based on our conversations with DCSD staff, we understand that it is not only size, but a room's regular function that ultimately determines whether DCSD considers if a room is an IU and is counted toward a school's student capacity. We would like to bring to your staff's attention that the three rooms that resulted in the capacity adjustment at Fernbank are not used as regular instruction classes but are used for pull-out special programs. Therefore, these rooms should not be counted as IUs and Fernbank's capacity should be based on the original 58 IUs and therefore 900 students.

The Staff Recommend Plan projects 815 students at Fernbank next year. At a 900-student capacity, our projected utilization will be 90.6%. This utilization percentage would be the highest in the Druid Hills Elementary Cluster and we request DCSD provide a balanced utilization between the 5 cluster elementary schools.

2. The Fernbank PAC requests DCSD take a long-range perspective in projecting future development in the proposed Fernbank attendance zone and in the cluster as a whole. Under the proposed staff recommended plan for redistricting, Fernbank will have the largest attendance area, much of which is projected for significant growth by future developments.

Each of the Druid Hills Elementary Redistricting Options from Round 2 and the current Staff Recommended Plan only include 2019 enrollment projections. Through conversations with Trenton Arnold, we were informed that DCSD has published updated 7-year enrollment projection data. As part of the Druid Hills Cluster Alliance, we have reviewed these 7-year enrollment projection charts and we have several questions regarding the data as they are not consistent with the current redistricting enrollment projections. Specifically, these 7-yr projections do not include the roughly 300 students leaving the Druid Hills Cluster and returning to the Cross Keys Cluster in 2019. Additionally, these charts project only Laurel Ridge Elementary to have an increase in enrollment over the next 7 years and project each of the other 4 cluster elementary schools to have a declining enrollment. This is not consistent with the opinions of our Cluster PACs as we project significant housing development and growth in the Avondale, Briar Vista and Fernbank attendance zones. As our PAC representatives are all parents that live within our school communities, we have first-hand knowledge of both future developments and the areas of most influx of families with school-aged and younger children. The Fernbank PAC, Clairmont Heights Civic Association, the Druid Hills Civic Association, and the Medlock Area Neighborhood Association can be a resource to DCSD in evaluating these future projections. For example, the areas near Walmart, Wholefoods 365, and DeKalb Medical along North Decatur Road have seen much commercial and residential development over the last few years and is expected to continue to develop with high-density apartments in the years to come. Additionally, the Medlock neighborhood has a higher than average number of homes that are owned by elderly individuals or are currently rental units, which have a high chance of

turning over to younger families with school age children given the current market. Long-term projections for elementary school attendance should factor this potential future development into school utilization planning to reduce the need to redistrict/rebalance schools in the near future.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions or clarification.

Respectfully,

Bradley Strawn
Fernbank Elementary PAC Chair

Co-Signed:

Steve Langdon, Vice-Chair

Kara Rozell, Secretary

Charlie Rogers

Diana Shoemaker

Cc:

Trenton Arnold, Regional Superintendent, Region 2

Marshall Orson, Vice Chair & Board Member, District 2

Hans Williams, Director of Planning, SPLOST Program