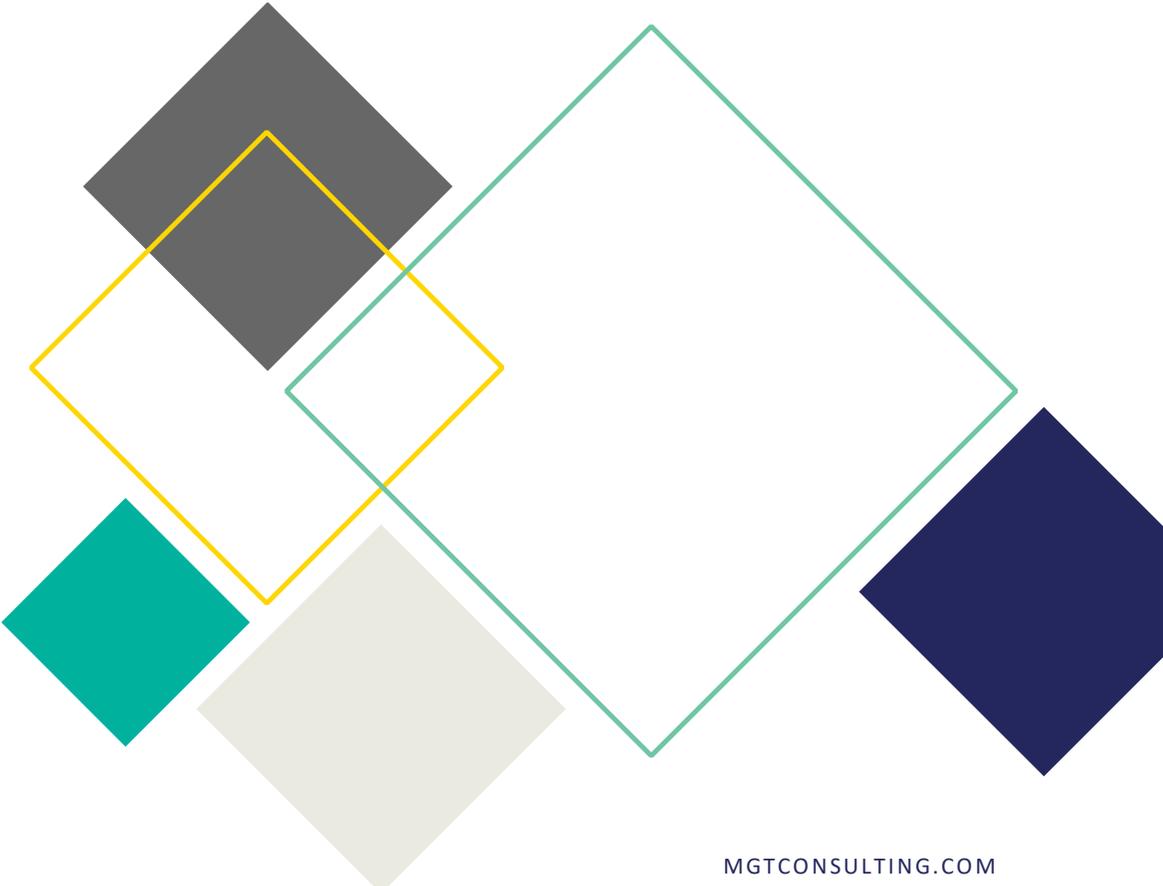


December 9, 2021



# Fairfax County Public Schools

**BOUNDARY POLICY BEST PRACTICES REVIEW  
FINAL REPORT**



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# Introduction

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) engaged with MGT Consulting Group in February 2020 to conduct an analysis of school boundary policies and additional best practices, educational research, and factors that could be considered for school boundary practices in order to update existing policies.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics<sup>1</sup>, the United States has over 13,000 geographically defined public school districts. Those school districts are responsible for operating and providing educational services to the public at the local level. As part of the operation of the district, local-level school boundaries must be established. School districts should have a transparent process that includes input from the community when establishing school boundaries.

This project identified best practices for school boundary policies and standard practices throughout the United States as well as obtain an understanding of the opinions regarding school boundaries in FCPS. The following information was compiled after a thorough review of published best practices and a review of policies of other school districts and after conducting surveys within the FCPS community. The goal of this work is to understand the effectiveness of the policies and how to approach the development of new policies.

As is best practice, it is important to establish that a policy is a type of internal control that provides guidance for an entity regarding procedures and practices. The purpose of a policy is to reduce waste, fraud, mismanagement, and liability while providing accountability, efficiency, integrity, reliability, and maintaining public trust.<sup>2</sup> A policy should fulfill all the above intentions while taking into consideration any unique situations that are present within the system to which it applies. The current Fairfax School Boundary Policy 8130 is a good foundation as a starting point for policy revision.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. 2019. School District Boundaries. Retrieved on April 8, 2020. From: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/DistrictBoundaries>

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, Training Workbook on Establishing Effective Policies, Procedures, and Management Controls

# Best Practices

School districts across the United States work hard every day to provide quality education for all students. One of the challenges for districts is to determine the boundaries for attendance within the district. Individual reasons for boundary changes may vary for districts across the country. There is no standardization for boundary policy layout and content. Best practices include those that have proven to be successful over time as well as common sense measures that help to improve an individual district’s policies. A policy needs to accommodate for the unique needs within an individual district, which should be considered and accounted for by the district board and leadership.

## Reasons to update school boundaries

According to Educational Data Systems, individual reasons for boundary changes may vary for districts across the country<sup>3</sup>. Topics ranging from growing enrollment and changing demographics to facility utilization or replacement can all be contributing factors to boundary changes (see Table 1). These topics should be considered when recommending or implementing school boundary changes.

Table 1. Reasons to Update School Boundaries

| School District Situation   | Example   | Implications for School Boundary Change  |
|---|---|--|
| Increasing enrollment   | Growing student population in pockets or across the district due to a new housing development.  | Overcrowded facilities are present across the district.  |
| Decreasing enrollment   | Dropping student population in pockets or across a district due to a military base closure.   | Underutilized facilities lead to budget inefficiencies.  |
| Uneven enrollment   | School A has twice the number of students living within its boundaries that it can accommodate while school B has less than half its capacity living within its boundaries. | Unbalanced facilities usage due to uneven geographic distribution of students leads to overcrowded and underutilized facilities. |
| Aging facilities  | An aging school building has wings or rooms that can no longer be used due to being condemned.  | Need for renovation or replacement of aging facilities.  |
| New facilities  | A new elementary school is built within the boundary of another elementary school.  | New schools will need students assigned to them, likely disrupting multiple attendance zones.                                    |
| Closing schools due to low enrollment, budget constraints, program “failures,” or natural disasters | Financial issues cause a district to close a school with low enrollment whose student population can be absorbed in other schools.  | Other schools must accommodate students from closed buildings.   |

<sup>3</sup> Educational Data Systems. September 4, 2018. Common Practices in Changing School Attendance Zone Boundaries. Retrieved on April 8, 2020. From: <https://eddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Common-Practices-in-Changing-School-Attendance-Zone-Boundaries.pdf> - Examples added to clarify the situations.

## BEST PRACTICES

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Change in education regulations or policies (for example, mandatory Pre-K, all-day K, and class size requirements) | A district-wide performing arts magnet school is opened in an existing school that previously had an enrollment boundary. | Changes in the associated facilities needs can necessitate school boundary changes.   |
| Transportation issues  | District boundaries are drawn in a way that students are not assigned to the schools nearest to them.                     | Redistricting could generate transportation efficiencies.   |
| Feeder pattern alignment   | Students attending the same middle school do not live in the same high school attendance boundaries.                      | Feeder pattern alignments keeps neighborhood students together throughout their K-12 matriculation.   |
| Educational programming change   | A district moves from elementary and middle schools to K-8.   | The district may need to evaluate school boundaries to reconfigure grades or to ensure that the same educational programming is available to all students, regardless of location in the district, socio-economic status, or race/ethnic group. |

Source: Common Practices in Changing School Attendance Boundaries <https://eddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Common-Practices-in-Changing-School-Attendance-Zone-Boundaries.pdf> - Examples added to clarify the situations.

## Prioritization

It is imperative for school districts to determine the priorities of boundary policies. Three overriding principles must always take precedence.

- **Equity.** Ensure that boundary policy provides equitable access to high-quality schools for all students.
- **Stability.** Ensure that boundary policy causes the least disruption for students and families.
- **Efficacy.** Ensure that boundary policy is grounded in educational and operational best practices and simply not an efficiency exercise.

When considering a change in boundaries or boundary policies, community input can provide helpful information that should be considered in the decision-making process. After priorities are established, a comprehensive communication plan should be established, with consideration given to staff, teachers, and families so each has adequate time to adjust as needed.

Using **Table 1** as sample situations, the district should determine if adjusting “uneven enrollment” is a higher priority than “feeder pattern alignment” or if correcting “transportation issues” is a higher priority than making an “educational program change.”

Other priorities may exist within the community that should be sought from stakeholders during the prioritization phase of the redistricting process. To establish priorities when considering a change in boundaries and boundary policy, community input is vital to gather in order to provide helpful insights

and information to be considered in the decision-making process through multiple engagement opportunities.

After priorities are established, communication and engagement with the community and stakeholders should occur to allow administrative staff, teachers, and families adequate time to reflect, provide feedback and adjust as needed.

## Different Types of Boundary Adjustments

**Standard Adjustment:** Occurs regularly through an established schedule to review school boundaries by examining enrollment trends, future projections, and school capacity.

**Administrative Adjustment:** Policy that allows district administration to place students in schools outside of their enrollment boundary or assigned school at the request of families (e.g., enroll all siblings in the same school; allow students to attend school close to the parent’s employer; allow students to remain in a school after moving out of the boundary zone).

NOTE: In reality, this is not boundary policy, but instead the granting of exceptions and exemptions. Administrative adjustment policies must be married to clear and transparent procedures that outline allowable occurrences within the school’s capacity and the district/parent role in providing transportation. Once established, there should not be deviation, as this is the prescribed and approved method of deviation.

**Temporary Adjustments:** These boundary fluctuations reflect real-time responses to environmental or other factors and are not permanent.

**Emergency Adjustment:** Immediate change to one or more school boundaries prompted by unforeseen and significant situations that occur outside of standardly scheduled review of boundaries. Regular boundary reviews can mitigate the need for these emergency adjustments.

NOTE: Emergency boundary adjustments are not best practice. Sound boundary policy includes a regularly scheduled review of school boundaries, as well as contingencies that account for anomalies that will initiate an immediate review of school district boundaries. For example, if a large middle income housing development begins construction within the boundary of an elementary school near capacity, this should prompt the district to re-evaluate the school’s boundaries to allow for the school to be within its capacity limits. Likewise, a military base closure should prompt the district to consider this impact on the local school’s enrollment.

Stipulations for a standard boundary adjustment are needed in a policy, but other types of boundary adjustments can be included on a case-by-case basis. If there is a clear need to include contingencies for administrative, emergency, or temporary boundary adjustments, then they should be included as well. Otherwise, enacting these types of boundary adjustments could lead to mistrust from the public due to their atypical nature. If the less common types of boundary adjustments are to be included in a policy, there should be distinct and transparent documentation as to the reason that these are included, and

the policy should be clear and concise as to what situations would allow for these boundary adjustments.

## Considerations governing school boundaries

School districts should use enrollment projections as a primary consideration when governing school boundaries. Enrollment projections are created through using historical enrollment data, demographic trends, housing developments, and any other known factors that might increase or decrease future student populations. Enrollment projections can be created by a district or through contracting with a reputable firm. Once enrollment projections are established, based on a clear definition of school capacity, districts should work to adjust boundaries in an effort to balance schools that are projected to be over-capacity along with schools that are projected to be under-capacity.

One suggestion for governing school boundaries is that:

Superintendents need to understand the relationship among programs, demographics and facilities and the proven methods for projecting enrollments and using all data well in planning. School districts should adopt a rolling five-year strategy to bring together programs, demographics, and facilities. It begins with computer mapping of school zones and students every year, integrated with a proven five-year enrollment projection program by grade and school. Those data are coupled with documented surveys of building renovation needs and capacities and alternatives for redistricting and construction in a process that includes public involvement.<sup>4</sup>

Districts should establish clearly articulated goals within boundary policy and a methodology to weight or prioritize these identified goals. Characteristics of these goals may address the following topics:

- Equitable access to high-quality programs.
- Ease of student/family access to schools.
- Efficiency of facilities and transportation.
- Diversity of students both racially and economically.
- Consideration toward academic performance throughout the district.

## Public Notice

The existing policy for Fairfax County Schools on providing public notice reads:

*Obtain public comment through a public hearing not less than 10 days after reasonable notice to the public in a newspaper of general circulation in the school division prior to providing (i) for the consolidation of schools... (iii)...for redistricting of school boundaries or adopting any pupil assignment plan affecting the assignment of fifteen percent or more of the pupils in average daily membership in the affected school.” [Code of Virginia: Section 22.1-79 (8)]*

<sup>4</sup> Carey, Kelley D. Why enrollment projections go wrong. Accessed April 8, 2020.  
<https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=18586>

With currently technological capabilities, best practice around providing public notice of potential boundary changes should also include website and social media postings, as well as direct messaging through district notification systems.

## Student Continuity or Phasing

Guidelines for implementation should be established after a thorough review of policy by school administration<sup>5</sup>. Established guidelines should strive to provide customized options that provide the best opportunities for students. Timing is essential for this activity to accommodate proper review and assurance that students will be accommodated to support their personal academic success.

There are two methodologies of fall and spring release of redistricting information. Fall accommodates time for review of unique cases but hard deadlines for appeals by families must be enforced to support an effective review process. A spring data release of redistricting enforces a strict policy without opportunities for families to appeal. Both methodologies assume an almost immediate implementation of a redistricting. Best practice in this case would be fall release, or a spring release that would not have implementation in the upcoming school year.

Upon determination of school boundary changes, there should be a committee composed of academic leadership to assess student impact. This review can identify the scenarios of changes that can occur and help to identify how those changes apply to students. Upon determination of action or adoption of plan, personnel should be designated to support the students in their transition. The goal of this activity is to ensure smooth transition of the students. This committee may also identify justifiable exemptions for individual students. Common reasons to consider exemptions:

- Unique academic programming at current school
- Timing, (may allow for additional year to finalize status)
- Review of student requests
- High School considerations
- Siblings

Policies related to neighborhood/boundary schools should be considered when students (families) continue at an out of boundary school. Best practice would be that a school district should not maintain two spots for students therefore when attending an out of boundary school their rights for space at the neighborhood school may be terminated. To be considered for the out of boundary school, an application process is often required.

## Review of Policy

School district boundary policies should be reviewed annually, with a five-year rolling projection in mind. The use of five-year rolling projections can allow districts to pull information from many local sources, including housing developments, birth rates, and cohort survival projections, local transportation, and

<sup>5</sup> Educational Data Systems. September 4, 2018. Common Practices in Changing School Attendance Zone Boundaries. Retrieved on April 8, 2020. From: <https://eddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Common-Practices-in-Changing-School-Attendance-Zone-Boundaries.pdf>

land use plans, and zoning policies, to make necessary adjustments<sup>6</sup>. As part of this strategy, programs, demographics, and facilities are able to be used to inform enrollment projections across the district. Districts should map school zones and students annually, along with considering capacity and renovation needs.

## Capacity Analysis

School Board revision of Fairfax County Schools' Policy 8130 is essential to develop a clear, concise document that adheres to the clearly stated purpose of this review, as identified at the onset of the document, which is as follows:

“To describe the authority of the School Board to determine assignment of students to schools and programs, to close schools and programs where appropriate and to define the considerations and procedures for such determinations.”

In Fairfax County Schools regulations and policies, capacity is incorporated in several documents. Regulation 8130 appropriately indicates that school and program capacity should be reviewed by appropriate program staff members as part of the first step in a boundary adjustment process. This process allows for an accurate assessment of school and program capacity, while incorporating other important factors that may impact capacity, including planned renovations or staffing adjustments.

As indicated above, school capacity is a very important factor when determining appropriate school boundaries. Capacity calculations can be performed in several different ways, each having a substantial impact on schools throughout the district. This variance in calculation can be problematic for creating consistent boundary policy. For this reason, it is important that a school district's intentions be clearly stated regarding methodology. In Fairfax, it is essential to consider other existing policies that impact Policy 8130.

- Policy 8120 regarding school planning indicates that capacity shall be determined by the educational program to be housed. Space allocation is based upon educational specifications to include supplemental educational spaces.
- Policy 8110 regarding the 5-year CIP planning indicates that the capital improvement plan recommendations should be developed with results from membership, capacity, and financial analyses and projections.

Prudence would dictate the 5-year plan and boundary change processes include capacity considerations. However, the definition for capacity could potentially be construed to the liking of future administrators. Policy 8120 indicates that capacity be calculated based on the educational program to be housed. This does give some direction but is still vague as to the details of how the capacity will be calculated. It may be beneficial to include some specific details about how educational programming relates to capacity, with specific numbers to ensure that there is no misinterpretation. Development of a policy specifically for calculating capacity may be an option as well due to the level of detail that would be needed to fully

<sup>6</sup> Hanover Research. 2015. Best Practices in District Rezoning. Retrieved on April 8, 2020. From: [https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/207/Best\\_Practices\\_in\\_District\\_Rezoning\\_-\\_Portland\\_Public\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/207/Best_Practices_in_District_Rezoning_-_Portland_Public_Schools.pdf)

define a capacity calculation. This additional level of detail would help to alleviate the risk of mismanagement on future boundary change initiatives.

## Recommendations

Update Fairfax County Public Schools Policy 8130 to ensure that best practices are being followed to support all students. Boundary policy decisions should include community input to guide the priorities of the district, however, a policy focused on equity, stability, and efficacy, and grounded in best practices should be the goal of this revision. Therefore, the following aspects should be strongly considered in the revised boundary policy:

1. Prioritize factors determining boundary policy.
2. Define school and program capacity to ensure consistency across the division.
3. Establish boundary adjustments based on balancing the number of schools and students for efficient use of buildings.
4. Centralize, regionalize, or duplicate programs with great demand in schools across the district to ensure equitable access for all families.
5. Limit time students are on busses and create efficient transportation networks.
6. Create an established and well-articulated exemption process.
7. Formally evaluate school boundary policies every five years.

Upon revision of Fairfax County Public Schools Policy 8130, the division should engage in a comprehensive enrollment boundary study to ensure equitable implementation of the updated policy.

# Family Feedback

## Survey Methodology

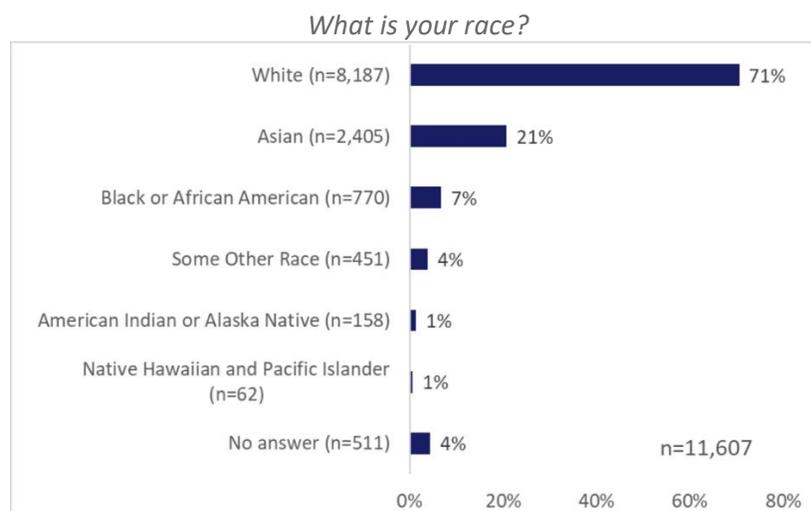
An online survey was sent electronically to 115,515 unique individuals identified by FCPS as the primary contact for children within the school system. Individuals with multiple students in FCPS were invited to participate in the survey multiple times, totaling 179,524 email invitations. While more than 51,352 emails were rejected as spam, the survey was successfully sent to 128,172 primary contact email addresses. The high level of email rejection was anticipated due to the attempt to email individuals multiple times with the same survey. This is normal and expected in online surveys. MGT successfully provided technical support for any individual who reached out with questions or needed additional support. Additional survey links were provided to any individual who indicated that they had trouble accessing the survey for additional children that they have in the division.

The survey was accessed 13,070 times. Respondents who completed only demographic items of the survey (1,463) and did not provide other useable answers were excluded from the dataset prior to analysis. The remaining 11,607 respondents are included in the analysis which follows.

## Analysis of Results

Respondents were asked to complete the survey once for each child they had within the school system. The data presented in this report should be considered through that lens.

The survey asked the race of the respondent, not the student in FCPS, and since respondents were allowed to choose multiple answers, response frequencies total more than 100%. Nearly three-quarters of responses came from white parents of students in FCPS. The racial breakdown of FCPS membership is shown below for comparison purposes.



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

*SY 2020-21 FCPS Membership Race & Ethnicity*

| Race and Ethnicity   | SY 2020-21 (Certified) |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| White (Non-Hispanic) | 66,366 (37%)           |
| Asian                | 35,617 (20%)           |
| Black                | 18,020 (10%)           |
| Multiple Groups      | 11,294 (6%)            |
| Hispanic             | 48,854 (27%)           |

Sources:

1. FCPS, Certified Membership, September 2020.

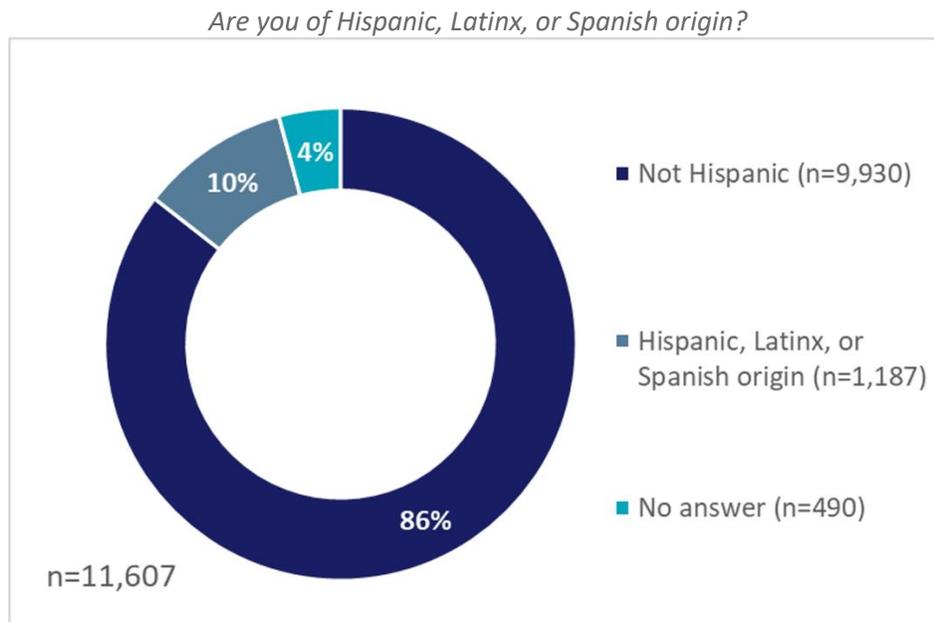
Notes:

1. Membership includes general education, special education, AAP, FCPS PreK, preschool, special education centers, preschool resource centers, alternative school programs, alternative court programs, adult education, multi-agency, and home school and private school special education services.

2. Membership includes students that attend an FCPS school and reside outside Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax.

3. Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

The survey asked the ethnicity of the respondent, not the student in FCPS. Eighty-six percent of responses came from a non-Hispanic parent, as shown below. The ethnic breakdown of FCPS membership is shown below for comparison purposes.



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

FAMILY FEEDBACK

SY 2020-21 FCPS Membership Ethnicity

| Race and Ethnicity | SY 2020-21 (Certified) |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Non-Hispanic       | 66,366 (73%)           |
| Hispanic           | 48,854 (27%)           |

Sources:

1. FCPS, Certified Membership, September 2020.

Notes:

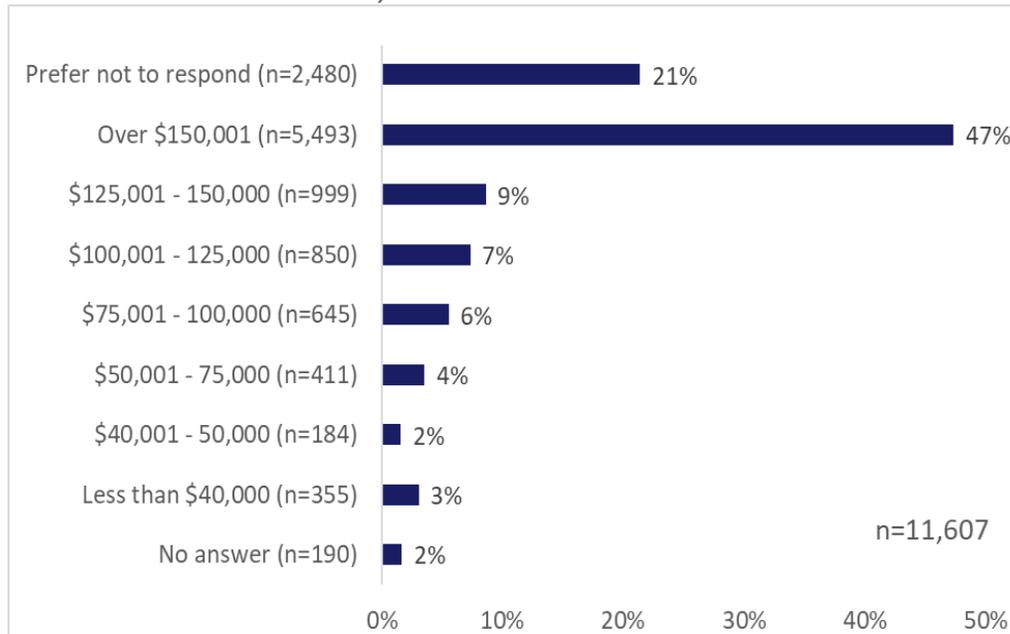
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2. Membership includes students that attend an FCPS school and reside outside Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax.

3. Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

Nearly half of respondents indicated that their annual household income is more than \$150,000. While the median household income in Fairfax County is \$124,831 (in 2019), according to the United States Census Bureau<sup>7</sup>.

What is your annual household income?



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> United States Census Bureau. Quick Facts Fairfax County, Virginia. Retrieved October 2021 from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fairfaxcountyvirginia>

FAMILY FEEDBACK

Every school within FCPS was represented in this survey with at least one survey response. Schools with fewer than 10 responses included:

- AIM
- Bailey’s Upper ES
- Bryant Alternative Learning Center
- Burke Alternative Learning Center
- Cedar Lane School
- Davis Center
- Garfield ES
- Hutchison ES
- Hybla Valley ES
- Interagency Alternative School
- Key Center
- Kilmer Center
- Lynbrook ES
- Mount Eagle ES
- Mount Vernon Woods ES
- Multi-Agency Services
- Pimmit Early Childhood Center
- Pulley Center
- Quander Road School
- Virginia Hills Early Childhood Center
- Weyanoke ES
- Woodlawn ES
- Woodley Hills ESA

The overwhelming majority of respondents reside in homes where English is spoken (85%). However, sixty-nine additional languages were noted by survey respondents as “other” languages spoken in the home. The home language breakdown of FCPS membership is shown below for comparison purposes.

*What language is spoken in your home?*

| Language spoken in the home | Number of responses | % of responses |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| English                     | 9,842               | 85%            |
| Other                       | 653                 | 6%             |
| Spanish                     | 279                 | 2%             |
| Chinese                     | 165                 | 1%             |
| Korean                      | 137                 | 1%             |
| Arabic                      | 84                  | 1%             |
| Vietnamese                  | 68                  | 1%             |
| Urdu                        | 56                  | 0%             |
| Farsi                       | 51                  | 0%             |
| Amharic                     | 28                  | 0%             |
| No answer                   | 244                 | 2%             |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>11,607</b>       | <b>100%</b>    |

Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

FAMILY FEEDBACK

SY 2020-21 FCPS Membership by Home Language

| Home Language    | SY 2020-21 (Certified) |
|------------------|------------------------|
| English          | 90,550 (51%)           |
| Other            | 25,221 (14%)           |
| Spanish          | 40,528 (22%)           |
| Chinese/Mandarin | 3,793 (2%)             |
| Korean           | 4,313 (2%)             |
| Arabic           | 6,047 (3%)             |
| Vietnamese       | 4,499 (2%)             |
| Urdu             | 3,036 (2%)             |
| Amharic          | 3,209 (2%)             |

Sources:

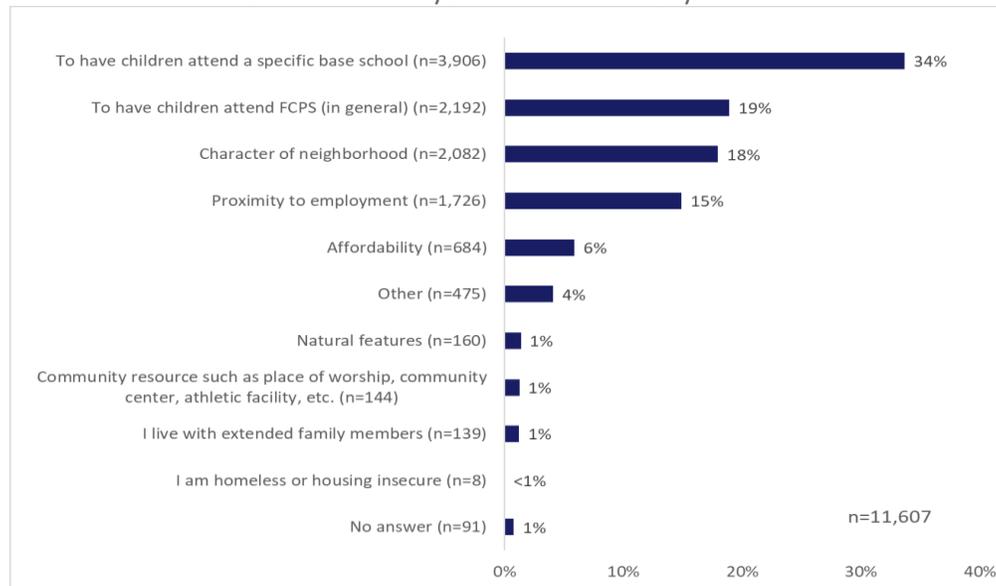
1. FCPS, Certified Membership, September 2020.

Notes:

- Membership includes general education, special education, AAP, FCPS PreK, preschool, special education centers, preschool resource centers, alternative school programs, alternative court programs, adult education, multi-agency, and home school and private school special education services.
- Membership includes students that attend an FCPS school and reside outside Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax.
- Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

More than one-third of respondents (34%) indicated that they chose their current residence in order for their children to attend a specific base school. An additional 19% chose their residence so that children could attend FCPS in general.

What is the number one reason you choose to live in your current residence?

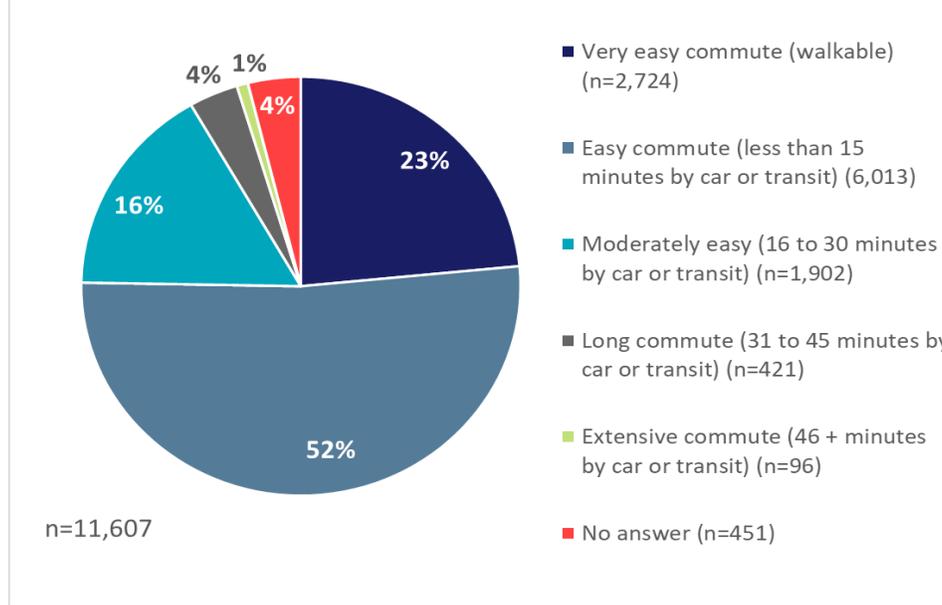


Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

FAMILY FEEDBACK

The overwhelming majority of responses indicate that their student’s commute to school is easy (23%) or very easy (52%).

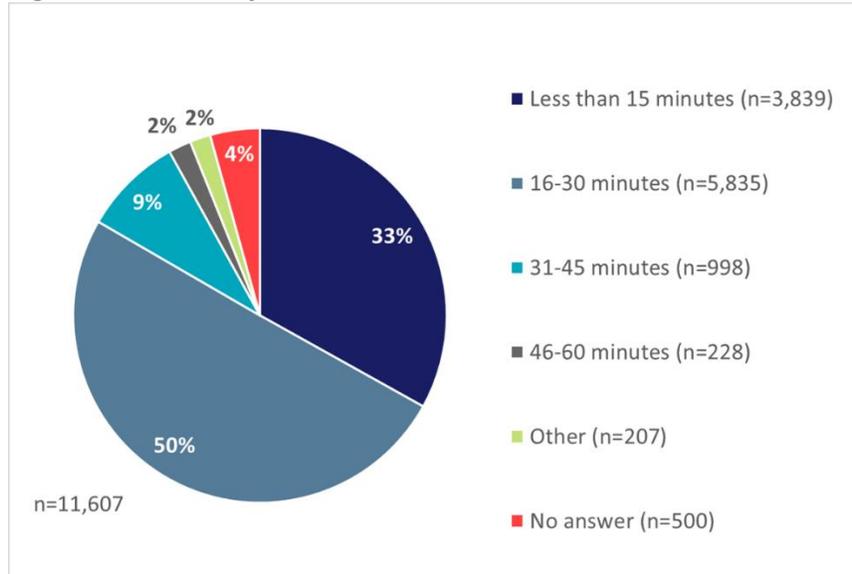
*On a typical day, how easy is it for your student to travel to your attending school?*



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

Half of responses (50%) indicate that students should spend no more than 16-30 minutes on a school bus one way, while an additional 33% believe that limit should be less than 15 minutes.

*What is the greatest amount of time that a student should travel on a school bus (one way)?*

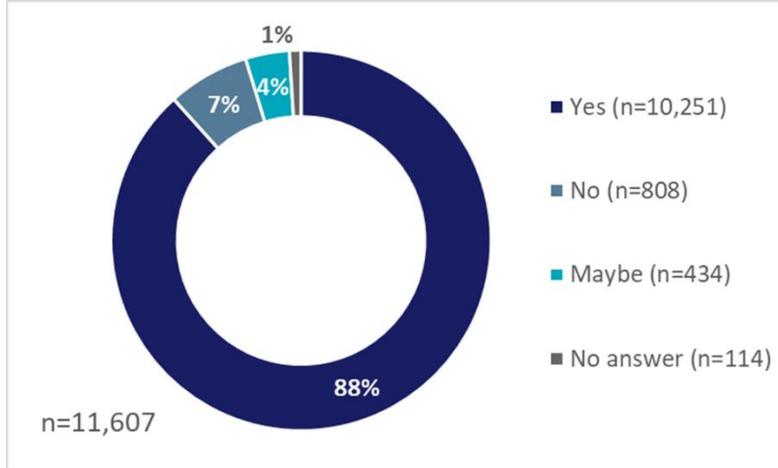


Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

## FAMILY FEEDBACK

Most students are or will be attending their base school (88%), and an additional 4% may attend the base school.

*Does your student attend or plan to attend your assigned base school?*

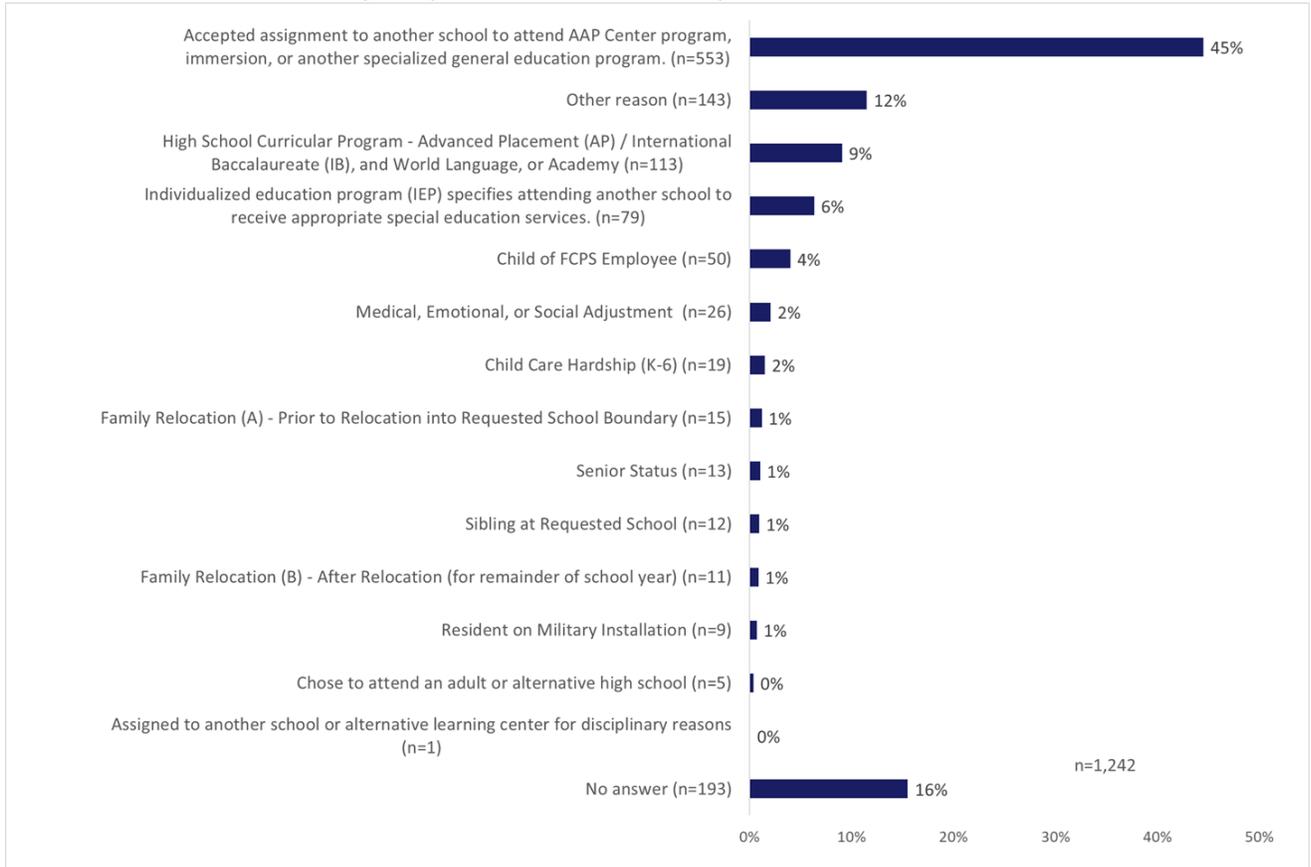


Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

Respondents who did not plan for their child to attend the base school were asked to provide a reason why, and the largest share of responses indicate that the child has been accepted an assignment to another school to attend AAP Center program, immersion, or other specialized general education program (45%). This question was only displayed to respondents who answered No in the previous question.

## FAMILY FEEDBACK

### *Why will your student not attend your base school?*

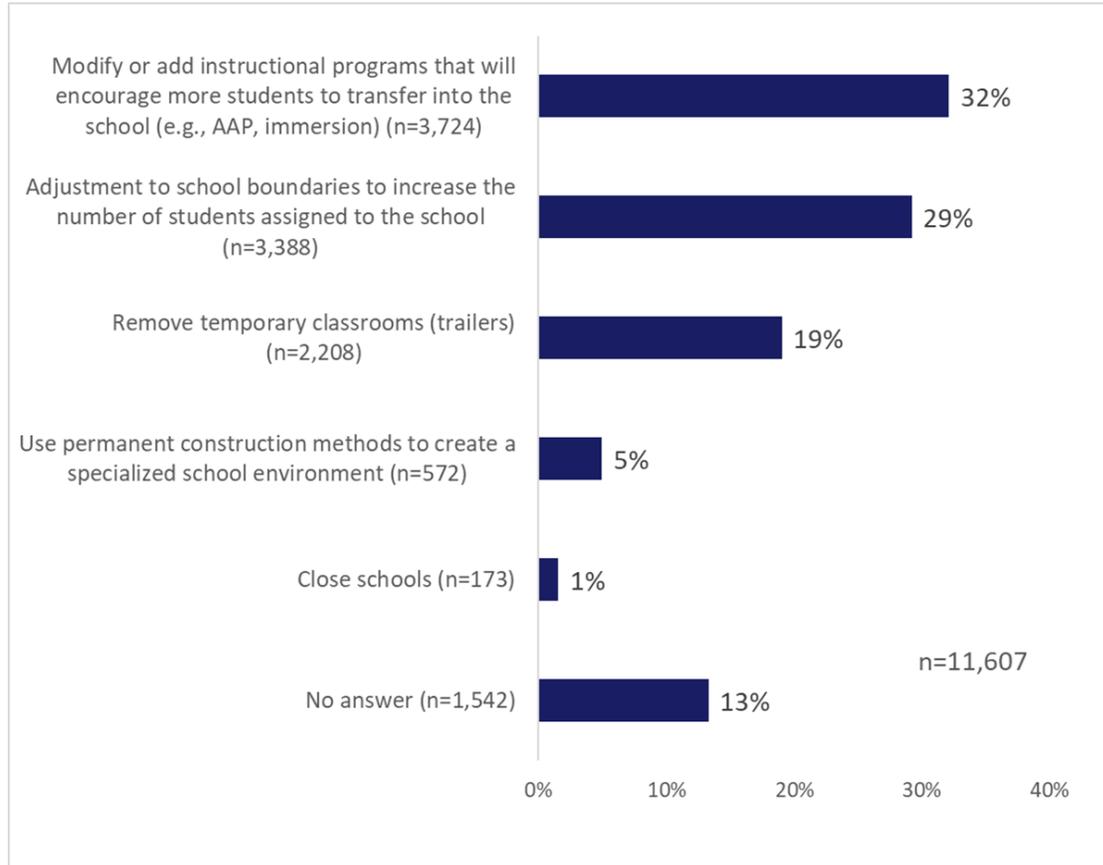


Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

When asked to indicate what the highest priority should be to address schools that do not have enough students to fill all classrooms, the largest share of respondents chose *modify or add instructional programs that will encourage more students to transfer into the school* (32%) followed by *adjustment to school boundaries to increase the number of students assigned to the school* (29%).

## FAMILY FEEDBACK

What should be the highest priority to address schools that do not have enough students to fill all classrooms?

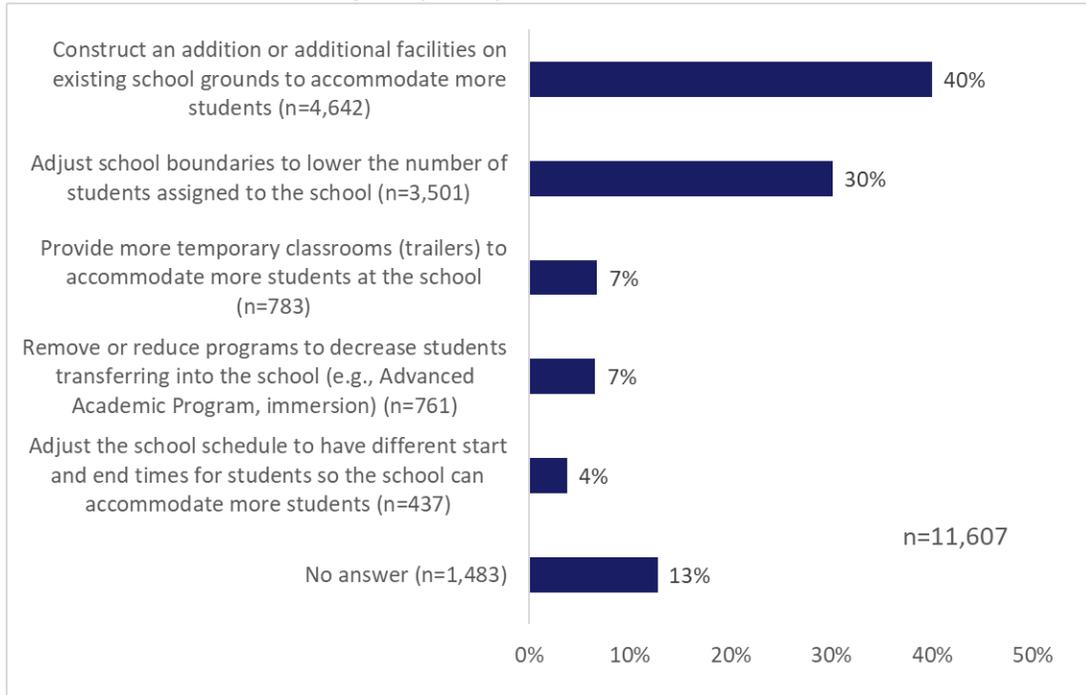


Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

When asked to indicate what the highest priority should be to address schools that are overcrowded, the largest share of respondents chose *construct an addition or additional facilities on existing school grounds to accommodate more students* (40%) followed by *adjust the school boundaries to lower the number of students assigned to the school* (30%).

FAMILY FEEDBACK

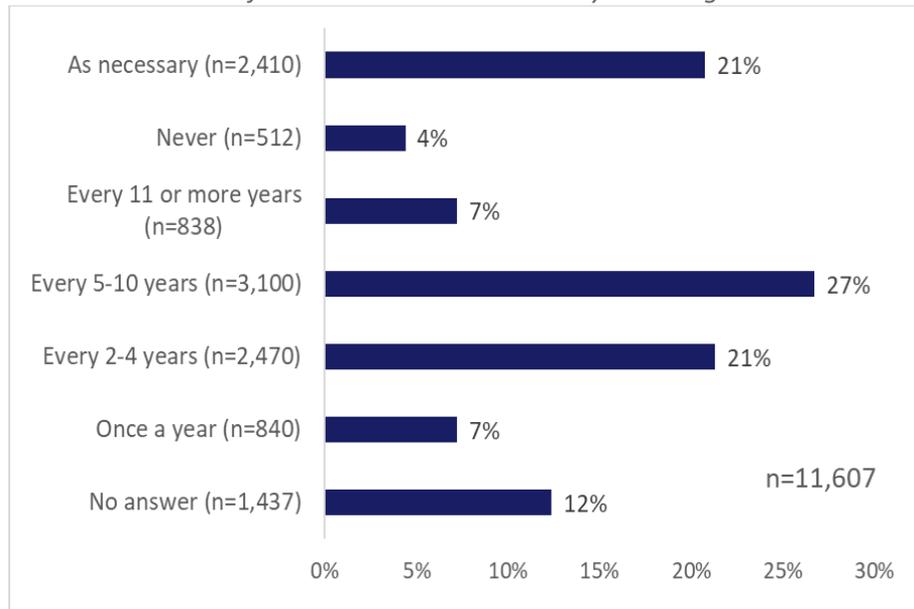
*What should be the highest priority to address schools that are overcrowded?*



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

The largest share of responses indicated that school boundaries should be changed every 5-10 years (37%) followed by as necessary and every 2-4 years (21%, each).

*How often should a school boundary be changed?*



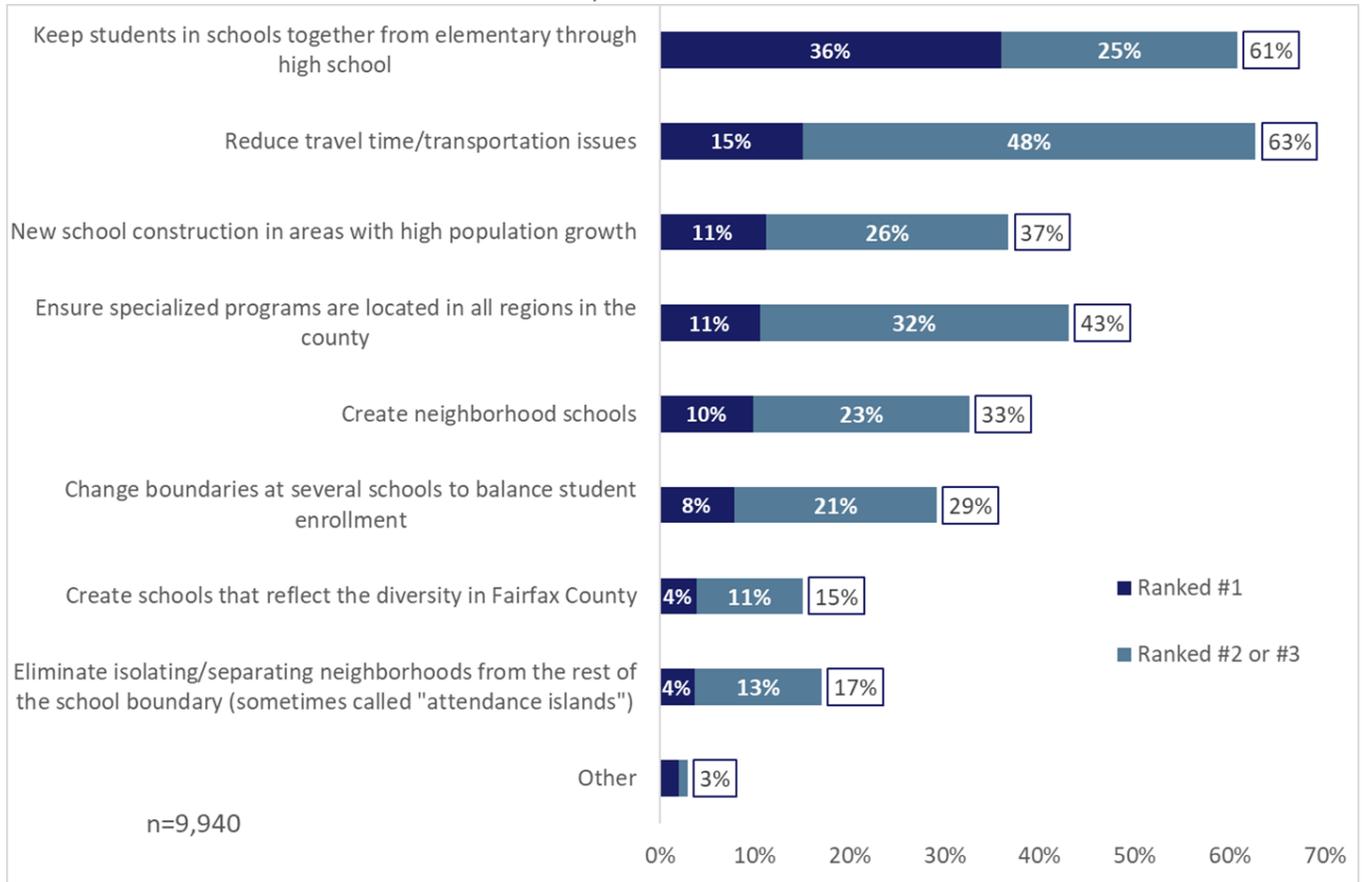
Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

FAMILY FEEDBACK

Most respondents ranked the following items in the top two reasons boundary changes should be considered:

- Keep students together from elementary through high school (61%)
- Reduce travel time/transportation issues (63%).

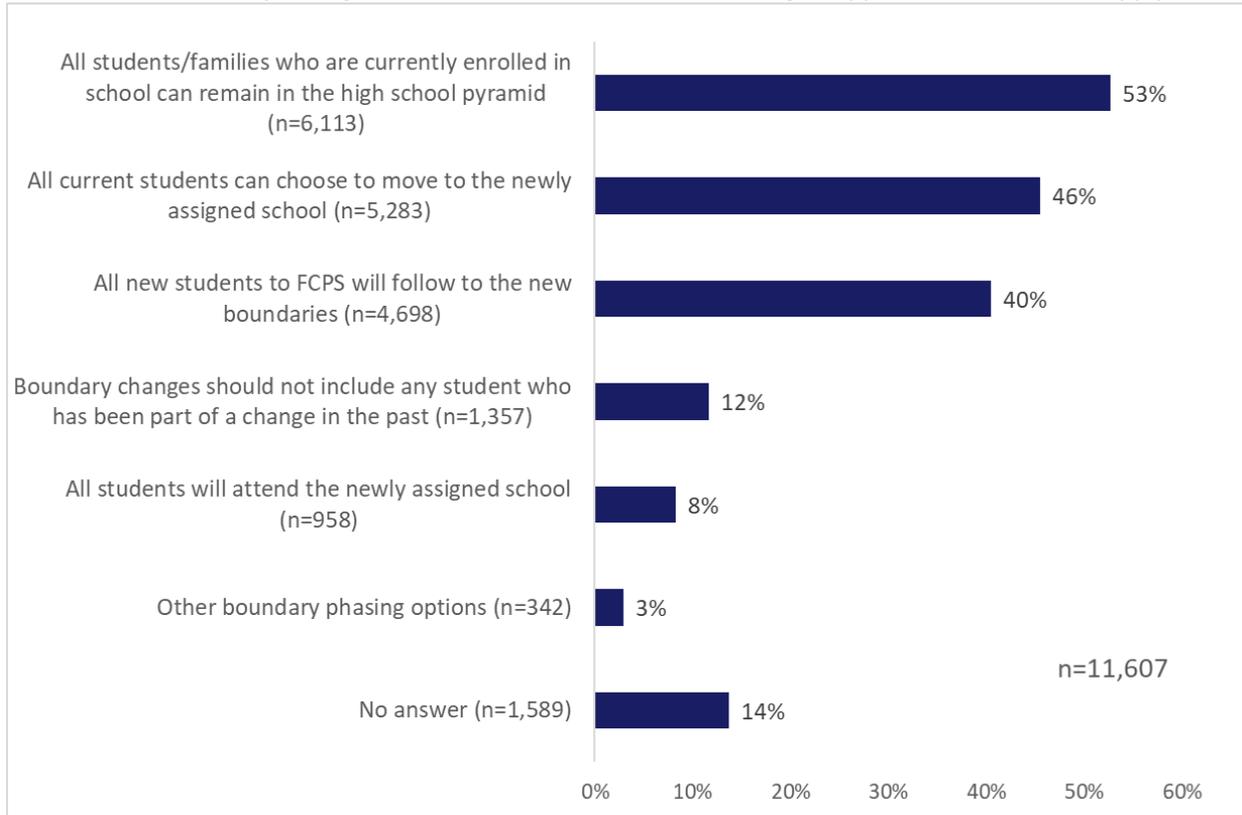
*Rank order items that should be considered for boundary changes from most important to least important.*



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

More than half of respondents indicated that, when boundary changes occur, *all students/families currently enrolled in school can remain in the high school pyramid (53%), followed by all current students can choose to move to the newly assigned school (46%).*

*When a boundary change should occur, how should the change happen? (Select all that apply.)*



Source: FCPS Parent Survey analysis, 2021.

## Qualitative Themes

Qualitative responses to open-ended items on the survey were reviewed in detail to identify common themes, which are offered below.

### What is the number one reason you choose to live in your current residence?

Common themes included:

- Accessibility/proximity to family, school, and/or work
- Affordability
- Combination of reasons
- Respondent had lived in the community for many years
- Military
- For children to be in a specific program, school, or school pyramid

## What is the greatest amount of time that a student should travel on a school bus (one way)? [Other Responses]

Common themes included:

- As long as it takes to get to their school
- Depends on the child, age, needs, or their circumstances

## Why will your student not attend your base school? [Other Responses]

Common themes included:

- Accepted into a special program
- Will or may attend a private school
- Concerns about overcrowding, or low quality of FCPS school(s)
- Too far from home

## Items that should be considered for boundary changes? [Other Responses]

Common themes included:

- Program availability
- Diversity and equity – some parents feel strongly that these are valid reasons to change boundaries, others feel equally passionate that they are not
- Ability to stay in original school or move
- School choice
- Boundary changes should be avoided – students shouldn't have to change schools
- Build more/bigger schools and/or charter schools
- Impact on home values
- Keep families together and siblings/friends in the same school
- Minimize disruption to families and educational quality
- Prevent overcrowding

## When a boundary change should occur, how should the change happen? [Other Responses]

Common themes included:

- Multi-year phase in, or years of advanced notice before changes take effect
- “Grandfather in” students/families/siblings to keep them together

## FAMILY FEEDBACK

- Allow certain students to opt out of the change (6<sup>th</sup> graders, seniors, current students, special needs children, military children who already move too often)
- Allow students to complete all grades in their current school before a boundary change goes into effect, so they transition naturally to the new school
- Boundary changes should only impact new students to the community
- Give families the choice
- Boundaries shouldn't ever change, and changes shouldn't be forced on students/families

### Additional thoughts on the future boundary policy.

Common themes included:

- Some parents expressed that no demographic or equity-based metrics should be considered in boundary decision making. Others feel strongly that diversity and equity should be high priorities for the county.
- Many respondents indicated that their home purchase was largely based on school proximity/assignment and that changes to their assigned school would be unwelcome.
- While some military families expressed openness to boundary changes, noting that their students are used to adapting, most indicated that these shifts would negatively impact their children who already have to change schools more than most.
- Boundary changes should not affect current students – or at the very least should be minimally disruptive
- Continuity of education and children's social networks is important
- Reduce transportation times
- Phase in any boundary changes
- Keep AAP centers consistent with HS pyramids

# Community Feedback

Members of the community were invited to participate in this review process. An online survey was open from September 13<sup>th</sup> through September 25<sup>h</sup> and was available to the community on the Fairfax County Public Schools Boundary Study website. During that 13-day window, the survey was accessed 2,088 times. Parents of FCPS students who attempted to take the community survey (1,233 responses) were referred to the parent survey and not permitted to complete the community survey. Some respondents answered only demographic questions (187 and are not included in the remaining analysis). The remaining 668 non-parent responses are included in the Supplemental Materials document and responses are similar to the Family Survey.

In addition, MGT conducted three webinars using the FCPS Zoom platform. All sessions were open to the public and live translation was available for a variety of languages, as requested by participants. Webinar participants were asked seven live poll questions. The anonymous poll responses were captured for analysis and are included in the Supplemental Materials document. While the questions asked in the Webinar were not identical to the questions in both the Family and Community Survey, they were similar. The responses in the webinar offer a similar opinion to the survey responses. Due to the anonymous participation of respondents, it is not possible to distinguish FCPS family members, employees, students, or community members in attendance at the webinar.