



Southwestern Boundary Study – Why the Rush to Put Our Kids In Trailers?

Fairfax County Public Schools is currently conducting a study of Elementary School boundaries to address current overcrowding in a handful of schools for the 2011-12 school year and the loss of 400 seats due to the closing of Clifton ES. The current recommendation of school staff directly impacts almost 1,500 kids in 21 schools – and their new classmates another 17,000+ kids who will now be in schools with inadequate facilities – overcrowded classrooms, gyms, music rooms, cafeterias and trailers. These boundary changes are projected to take place this year (September 2011) before any new classroom and facilities are built. Lost in the debate is that fact that much of the school overcrowding is not projected to occur until later. So why disrupt the education of so many southwestern students and families now?

There are a whole slew of unanswered questions related to this boundary study. In my opinion the biggest is – Why the rush? Why rush kids and teachers into school trailers and inadequate facilities that don't meet the county's basic educational specifications?

The public hearings for the boundary study are today, February 7, 2011 at Luther Jackson Middle School beginning at 6:00PM and concluding when all speakers have been heard. If you live in the southwestern section of the County please consider attending the meeting TONIGHT. Let the school board know that you want answers. Ask why they are rushing a process that doesn't need to be rushed and that will force our kids and teachers into facilities that are not yet ready. Ask why they are not giving serious consideration to the option that would let students and teachers stay in proven facilities for the time being while new facilities are being constructed.

Over half of the PTA's from the impacted schools have already passed a "No Faith" resolution expressing a lack of confidence in the process, projections, building capacity data, and the rushed timetable pushed by school staff. The PTAs and their members recognize this is the largest boundary study in FCPS history. The PTAs' resolution asks the school board to halt the boundary study until school staff answers the following basic questions:

- Why move students into schools without existing capacity before permanent capacity, in the form of newly proposed building additions, is complete? Trailers and modulars are not permanent solutions.
- What are the basic transportation plans including cost and ride times?
- What is the traffic impact on the local communities? Is there sufficient parking, kiss and ride, and bus drop off space?
- Has staff considered construction of a new elementary school at or near the epicenter of overcrowding – Would this be a cheaper option and less disruptive option than spending, at minimum, \$15.1M of your taxpayer dollars on expansions? Some 'big schools' will, as a result of the proposed expansions, become even bigger schools – is this the best option for our kids and teachers?
- What is the plan for SACC placement when children with a SACC assignment at their current school are moved to another school?
- How will FCPS address concerns of impacted families who may be moved from a school with current full day kindergarten to a new school that has half-day kindergarten?
- Is this an opportunity to build space for full day kindergarten?

I encourage you to go to the FCPS school boundary site to see if you can find the answers to these questions - <http://www.fcps.edu/fts/planning/southwesternstudy/index.htm>

It is clear to me that the Southwestern Boundary Study and the decision to close Clifton should have been considered together, and if they had been considered together, the school board wouldn't have closed Clifton ES. School staff says the two issues are not linked. But the absurdity of closing Clifton ES - our number two best performing elementary school with a capacity of 400 that did not need to be renovated - only to move students to other sites with inadequate facilities - raises serious questions that need to be answered. The school board's rush to close Clifton by June 2011 and accomplish demographic shuffling in the boundary study before a new school board is elected in November is a major disservice to potentially thousands of the kids, families and teachers in southwestern Fairfax County.

The fact is there is no need to rush this process. The School Board should wait until it addresses the issues identified by the concerned PTA's and the families they represent. And new facilities should be created before they move our kids into a worse situation with inadequate facilities. Unfortunately, that was not one that was presented to parents by school staff for consideration.

Southwestern Boundary Study Schools Impacted:

Bonnie Brae, Colin Powell, Greenbriar East, Providence, Brookfield, Cub Run, Greenbriar West, Bull Run, Deer Park, Union Mill, Centre Ridge, Eagle View, London Towne, Virginia Run, Centreville, Fairfax Villa, Oak View, Willow Springs, Clifton, Fairview, Poplar Tree

Clifton ES Closure:

Clifton Elementary was approved for closure by the School Board in July. Board members cited the following reasons for closing the school:

- high renovation costs (disputed claim but undisputed was the communities request not to renovate the #2 best performing elementary school in Fairfax County and leave it open),
- decreases in enrollment projects (enrollment actually increased) and
- water safety concerns (water quality proved to be fine – FCPS has stopped using bottled water at the school)

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