September 12, 2016

Mr. Joshua Williams
Chief Operating Officer
DeKalb County School District
1780 Montreal Rd
Tucker, GA 30084

RE: Secondary School Facility Planning and Feasibility Study

Mr. Williams:

On behalf of the membership and leadership of the Cross Keys Foundation, I thank you for the opportunity to provide input on your team’s current initiative, the “Secondary School Facility Planning and Feasibility Study (the “Study”).

Cross Keys Foundation members have followed the Study process from the beginning and applaud the thorough, methodical, and open method your team has applied to the public engagement. By participating in public meetings, small group reviews, and by seeking counsel from our fellow public education stakeholders in the DeKalb County School District (DCSD) across clusters, we have developed the following position on the Study options and items for decision by the Board of Education.

Our position is formed of guiding principles, assertions, and proposals.

Guiding Principles should be ever-present in dialog and decision-making during planning and execution.

Guiding Principle #1: Equity and Access First - strategic capital investments by DCSD must be made to ensure equity and access to educational opportunities and positive learning environments for all DeKalb children.

Guiding Principle #2: Size Provides Flexibility – to support long-term flexibility in capacity planning and programming DSCD should build sites to support 1,500 or more middle school students and 2,400 or more high school students.

Guiding Principle #3: Speed - due to the egregious and growing overcrowding of Region 1 and Region 2 schools, speed in decision-making and in execution are essential.

Guiding Principle #4: Incremental Progress is Progress - that all gaps and issues cannot be resolved in a single project, decision, or action must not be used as a rationale for postponing critical decisions.
Guiding Principle #5: Avoid Absolutes - the District must maintain flexibility in execution of SPLOST V projects and the response to the Study in order to adapt to future changing conditions that will arise during the implementation period.

Assertions are what we believe are self-evident, practical realities that cannot be ignored in the decision-making or implementation process.

Assertion #1: Re-clustering as a result of the SPLOST V construction should be done using whole elementary school zones wherever possible.

Assertion #2: Resulting clusters should serve between 4-6 elementary schools with enrollment targets of 500-900.

Assertion #3: Due to enrollment size and projections, no more than two of any of the following elementary schools should feed into a cluster together in the re-clustering effort: Hightower, Pleasantdale, Cary Reynolds, Dresden, Montclair, and Woodward.

Assertion #4: In their current configuration, neither Dunwoody, Druid Hills, Lakeside, nor Tucker clusters are able to absorb an additional high enrollment elementary school.

Assertion #5: Assertions #1-4 require that, as the two remaining clusters in the region, Chamblee (CCHS) and Cross Keys (CKHS) will be the receiving clusters in the re-clustering effort. Considered with geography, this assertion posits that Hightower and Pleasantdale should continue to feed their current clusters and the four remaining elementary schools must be paired as two groups, Woodward / Montclair and Dresden / Cary Reynolds.

Assertion #6: We believe that the necessary funds should be identified to support the level of educational environments all children deserve. We feel that creating a fourth cluster and high school in the Region 1 area will unnecessarily perpetuate inequities in the Region for portions of the Cross Keys Community. We also believe a fourth cluster will raise the level of initial capital required and forever burden the District with additional operational expenses. This can be avoided by keeping a three high school Region 1 strategy.

Proposals are our view of the key elements of a plan to address the Secondary Schools Study. We believe that the two key questions represented in the Study options are (along with our answers):

1. Where should DCSD build a new high capacity HS? (Near CKHS’ current site)
2. Should the High Achievers Magnet programs be moved? (Not at the HS at this time)
Proposal #1: Build a HS with core services to support up to 2,800 students with a site plan to open at 2200-2400 students. The site should be built near the current Cross Keys HS and the current CKHS facility should be repurposed as a 1,500-1,800 MS.

Proposal #2: Sequoyah MS should feed Chamblee Charter HS and the CMS site should be used for one of the following uses: as another feeder ES or MS of CCHS as a joint feeder along with Sequoyah MS, for future re-use for Magnet as a 4-8 academy at a dedicated facility (this frees up Nancy Creek ES to be an attendance area ES or “lower grade school” to relieve and feed Montgomery ES), or as swing space.

Proposal #3: When the new John Lewis ES opens, Dresden ES should send ~ 50%+ of its students to new John Lewis ES. A scenario may arise were the “2nd Elementary School” planned for Doraville area to relieve Cary Reynolds could absorb the remaining Dresden students. While speculative, we feel it is important to anticipate enrollment changes due to redevelopment of Buford Hwy throughout the region and be prepared to feed students north or south via the two new elementary schools to supply the future CKHS or current CCHS as circumstances direct and capacity comes online 2019 and later.

Proposal #4: We believe it is less disruptive to retain the HS Magnet seats via classroom additions at the current CCHS. Should the growth in the area continue or even accelerate in the coming years as forecast, the 800+- seats this program represents should be leveraged at the discretion of DCSD if circumstances require it. This is a DeKalb program and should be managed as such.

Proposal #5: Keep Clarkston cluster “whole” by finding necessary funding to support the expansion of the current CHS. The Options as presented by DCSD appeared to pit CK community against both the Magnet in Option C and Clarkston’s desired expansion in A and C. We believe that unless there are no financial alternatives found, the addition requested to keep Clarkston “whole” should be considered.

Proposal #6: We believe that all remaining clusters in Regions 1 and 2 should address overcrowding via classroom and core services additions and that the Planning Department should be directed to devise such plans that minimize or eliminate split feeders.

We believe that when adopted jointly, these Proposals will likely produce the following outcomes:

1. All current Cross Keys High students and Chamblee High students will be districted to a modern high school facility providing equity in environments and access to similar high quality educational and developmental programs.

2. The parents and stakeholders in Doraville and Chamblee that have for many years complained about not attending the high school closest to them will be able to do so at the CCHS site one to three miles from their homes.
3. The two resulting clusters will be diverse as defined by socio-economic status, ethnicity, and language. Service areas and natural communities of interest will ensure viability of each.

4. Two high capacity and high functioning high schools with full curriculum and full extra-curricular offerings can result. We expect particular benefits for current gaps in academic programming and Title IX offerings for Cross Keys High School students.

5. DCSD will be positioned to evaluate strategic curriculum delivery via a standalone High Achievers 4-8 grade academy (optionally) and to engage with community stakeholders in a dialog about programming and how to expand the offerings of advanced curriculum throughout the District and to populations that have limited access to such.

6. DCSD will be positioned to leverage redistricting throughout Regions 1 and 2 with additional capacity added at key secondary school sites in the area.

Should the District see value in all of our outlined Guiding Principles, Assertions, and Proposals and act on them we would remain concerned about the following operational questions:

1. How will the District staff high capacity ES, MS, and HS properties coming to Region 1?
2. How will the District properly provide the support services to the special populations that are currently concentrated in Cross Keys when they are split between Cross Keys and Chamblee?
3. How will the District properly provide interpretive and translation services necessary to maintain LEP parental communications without a negative impact on parent involvement?
4. How will the District ensure full academic “parity” in the offerings at both resulting HSes?

We are confident the District can address the above concerns and questions as long as it maintains a long-term commitment to accept no excuses and adopt best practices that are well known and well implemented in nearby districts.

Thank you for acknowledging the long-standing inequity in our region and for committing yourselves and the District to remedies that are practical and progressive. We also commit ourselves to support the District’s efforts in this long-term mission to provide an excellent educational experience for all DeKalb students.

Sincerely,

Kim Ellis Gokce, President

CC: Dr. Stephen Green, Board Members of the Cross Keys Foundation